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Superintendent Perceptions of the Accreditation Process in the State of Mississippi

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SUPERINTENDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS IN THE

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

by

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ABSTRACT

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The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provides guidelines that all public schools
in the United States must follow. Provisions of this law require that specific assessments
be given to all students in schools across the United States and that individual states
establish one system of accountability for all schools. Although much is being done,
public schools are still lacking in the area of accountability reform. Many states set their
own achievement goals and standards for which schools within their states are measured
and then held accountable for students' performance. This study examined the
perceptions of all Mississippi school superintendents toward the criteria used in
determining accreditation and the impact of accreditation standards. The researcher used a
descriptive and inferential quantitative approach to examine how the perceptions of
superintendents were related to specific demographic characteristics based on their school
districts. Moreover, the perceptions of superintendents were categorized by the size of
school district and superintendents' type of position, elected or appointed.

The results indicated that there was no significant difference in superintendents'
perception of multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditation process as well as
the impact that Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools based on district
size. However, results indicated that there was a significant difference in the perception of

elected and appointed superintendents toward multiple criteria used when accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi. Superintendents had a difference of perceptions on dropout rate, building maintenance upkeep, and technology access. There was no significant difference in the perceptions of elected and appointed superintendents toward the impact Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools.

The results in this study also indicated that Mississippi public school superintendents agree that students' performance on state tests should be a part of multiple criteria used in the accreditation process, as well as teacher endorsement in their content area. Superintendents in the state of Mississippi are strongly against using test scores as sole criteria in the state public schools' accreditation process. Superintendents agreed that the impact of accreditation standards has motivated them as well as principals to direct their focus on improving instruction for students' learning, as well as increased stress for administrators and teachers. The results also indicated that superintendents strongly disagree that the impact of state standards has caused an increase in funding for public education in the state of Mississippi.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have worked to improve accountability and accreditation standards in the education system by measuring student performance and raising standards. These joint efforts have equipped policymakers, educators, and parents with the tools needed to grade not only students, but also their schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Although much is being done, public schools are still lacking in the area of accountability reform. Many states set their own achievement goals and standards for which schools within their states are measured and then held accountable for students' performance. In 1994, Congress reauthorized Title I to emphasize accountability for the academic learning for students served through title programs. In the past few years, states across the country have passed accountability laws or taken measures to improve and develop effective accountability systems. Within this accountability system, mandates have been put in place that require proficiency tests, which eliminate social promotion and the use of high school exit exams (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Accountability is synonymous with responsibility. To be accountable is to be responsible for an outcome (Wilgoren, 2001). When it comes to education, accountability is ensuring that all students receive a quality education which provides them with the basic skills needed to graduate from high school and reach their highest learning potential, regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background. Basic skills are defined by outlining what students are expected to know at every grade level (Connecticut Department of Education, 2007).

In 1980, advocates for school reform presented accountability legislation on the local, state, and national levels with the main focus being merit schools, interstate comparisons, outcome based accreditation, and state school report cards (Matthews & Johnson as cited in Bullard, 1998). School report cards have become a common part of the accountability and accreditation process for states across the country. Mississippi's schools first state report card was published in 1993. The purpose of the report card was to inform the public of the quality of measures of accreditation in the state public schools. Accreditation is a process that guarantees academic excellence. The accreditation process was developed around the 1600s with the expectation of accountability for funding for the educational system. Through this development, individual states were charged with developing an effective system of public education as well as the task of establishing accreditation regulations (Matthews & Johnson as cited in Bullard, 1998).

During past decades, the state of Mississippi has attempted to reform education by looking at the school accreditation process, because there continues to be great emphasis of looking at measures of quality rather than quantity. Many mandates made by the state legislators during the past 20 years have been positive in creating the current public school accreditation model and accountability system used in the state. These efforts have established the state of Mississippi as a nationally recognized leader in the school improvement and accountability movement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). Even with this recognition, the Mississippi office of accreditation's primary responsibility is to administer the state's performance-based accreditation system for public schools. The accreditation office continues to report that school accountability is a major issue and is in great need of reform in the state (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008b).

The Mississippi Reform Act of 1982 was established to design a system that promoted quality educational programs in all schools in the state. One of the outcomes of this act was the formation of establishing district accreditation levels based on school district performance. The system was performance-based accreditation that was based on qualities that displayed the extent to which schools provided instructions that allowed students to master the content and objective being taught (Bullard, 1998).

In the past, Mississippi's school accreditation system was two-fold. Individual school systems were awarded accreditation status if the district showed that it was in compliance with state standards (Mississippi State Department of Education, 2007). In the spring of each school year, all students in the state of Mississippi in grades 2 through 8 were given state tests. For the past several years, students have taken the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT). The MCT assesses students' knowledge in reading, language, and mathematics. Students' performance on the Mississippi state test is reported by proficiency levels:

- Advanced - students consistently perform at current grade level and beyond.

- Proficient - students master content and knowledge of skills required for success at the next grade level.

- Basic - students' performance demonstrated partial mastery of content and skills that are required for success at the next grade level.

- Minimal - students performed below basic, and did not show mastery of skills required for the next grade level. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005, p. 6)

During the 2007-2008 school year, Mississippi administered the Mississippi Curriculum Test II (MCT II) for the first time to students in grades 2 through 8. This test is designed to measure students' Depth of Knowledge (DOK). Students in secondary schools in Mississippi are given subject area tests in Algebra I, Biology I, English II, and U.S. History (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

Based on students' performance on the state test, individual schools receive a performance classification during the fall of the following year. In the past, individual schools were assigned a 1-5 performance classification that is based on:

· *Growth Model* - meeting annual growth expectation established by testing students annually and by following students' progress.

· *Achievement Model* - the percentage of students who are achieving at a certain level. The 10 lowest-performing level 1 schools in the state will be designated as priority schools. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 26)

School performance classification levels 1-5 in the state of Mississippi are as follows:

· Achievement Level 5: A school that receives Superior Performing.

· Achievement Level 4: A school that is exemplary or exceeds growth expectation.

· Achievement Level 3: A successful school that met its growth expectation.

· Achievement Level 2: A school that is under-performing and fails to meet growth.

·   Achievement Level 1: A school that is low-performing and fails to meet its

growth expectation and may be designated as a priority school.

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2007, p. 26)

The state of Mississippi recently revised the State Accountability Model. Hank

Bounds, the State Superintendent of Education, sent out a memorandum to district

superintendents, members of the State Board of Education, Commission of School

Accreditation, and other interested parties informing them that as of February 20, 2009,

the State Board of Education granted approval to begin the Administrative Procedures

Act (APA), a process for the proposed revisions of the State Accountability System

(Massey, 2009). The Accountability System Recommendation includes six general issues:

1.   The accountability system should provide an accountability designation for

schools and district.

2.   The accountability system should move the state toward the goal of

national average performance. This purpose might be accomplished as

follows:

a.   through setting growth for high performing schools using targets

that would reach national average performance

b.   by reporting school and district comparisons to the Southeastern

average, national average, and high performing state average

performance

c.   by recognizing schools or districts for reaching the Southeastern

average, national average, and high performing state average

performance levels

3. The accountability system should include an achievement component, a growth gain component, and a graduation/dropout component.

4. The accountability system rating label should be different than the previous system. The recommended accountability system labels, from highest to lowest performing, include Star School, High Performing, Satisfactory, Low Performing, Academic Watch, At-Risk of Failing, and Failing.

5. The district rating should be based on the performance of all students in the district; the district will be treated as one K-12 school.

6. The graduation status and U.S. History test scores of students attending the School of Mathematics and Science and the School of Arts should be assigned to their home school for purposes of accountability. (Massey, 2009, p. 2)

The recommendation also includes a revised Achievement Model Formula, Growth Model, and Graduation/Dropout component. The revisions recommended are based on the new curriculum frameworks in language arts, mathematics, and corresponding assessments that have been implemented. These changes are expected to be in effect for the 2009-2010 school year pending completion of the APA process and final approval by the State Board of Education (Massey, 2009).

In 2001, the federal government decided to intervene by implementing an action plan to make schools in the United States more accountable for students' learning. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), Public Law 107-110, reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of America's primary and

secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states and school districts, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend (Madaus, 2007).

The NCLB Act was designed to reduce the gap in achievement between specific groups of students and to ensure that all students develop basic skills in reading and mathematics. All states must administer tests annually in mathematics and language for grades 3 through 8 and in high school. This process was put into place to measure the progress in closing the achievement gap and to assure that students are being given a quality education. Each state has established its own testing programs and criteria for students' performance. NCLB requires states to classify all students into one of the following categories: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and, by default, Failure. The federal government uses these classifications to hold schools accountable for improving student performance each year for the following categories of students: ESL, those with disabilities; American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; African American; Hispanic; and White. Schools that fail to meet these improvement goals for one or more sub-groups face closure or state takeover (Madaus, 2007).

Mississippi schools are doing well as part of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Only 6% of the schools in Mississippi did not meet their progress requirements in the 2005-2006 academic year. The 2005-2006 test scores were quite impressive despite the problems and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which affected Mississippi just before school started that year. There were marked improvements in reading and language, as well as math in the elementary grades. Additionally, middle and high school students also showed slight improvement. Despite these test improvements, Mississippi was still

ranked 49 of 50 in the "Smartest State" rankings, based on Morgan Quinto's annual

reference guide *Education State Rankings* for the 2005-2006 school year (Mississippi

Department of Education, 2008a). Over 70% of Mississippi students attend Title I

schools. Title I schools are schools in low-income areas needing to focus on improving

academic performance of their students. As a result of being labeled Title I, these schools

receive more federal funding (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008a). The

superintendent of Oxford public schools in Mississippi believes that the manner in which

his districts utilized their title funds played a major role in the increase of student

achievement (Vail as cited in Mulligan, 2002).

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been a greater focus

on standards-based school accountability. In past years, there has been great pressure

placed on teachers being accountable for students' performance. Since the new

implementation of the NCLB Act, the focus has changed to school leaders and their

ability to lead in a way that produces a quality and successful education experience for all

students and one that guarantees that all students are receiving the basic skills needed,

which produce positive results and performance on state tests (Mississippi Department of

Education, 2005).

As of 2008, accountability of student performance has transferred to school

superintendents. In the 2008 regular legislative session, members of the Legislative Task

Force in the state of Mississippi established Senate Bill 2505 to study and report on the

status of under-performing schools and school districts, and the enhancement of

accountability and sanction imposed on those schools and school districts. Members of

the task force presented a review of research that indicated the connection of leadership

position of public school administrators at all levels. The report includes principals, superintendents, and board members with a recommendation for policy change from state leaders representing teachers, superintendents, and board members (Blanton, 2008).

The president of the Mississippi Association of Education, Kevin Gilbert, expressed the importance of schools having quality leadership being a leading factor in having good teachers and the importance of recruiting and retention of good teachers (Legislative Task Force, 2008). Also in 2008, Senate Bill 2149, which was passed in the Mississippi regular legislative session, requires the removal of an elected or appointed superintendent in an under-performing school district for 2 consecutive full school years and the district being under the administration of the same superintendent during those 2 consecutive full school years (Legislative Task Force, 2008). Senate Bill 2149 echoes legislation signed May 12, 2008, by the Governor of Mississippi, Haley Barbour, that addressed superintendents of school districts that are labeled under-performing as measured by the state accountability accreditation system for 2 consecutive years could result in the loss of their job. Elected superintendents would be removed by the governor and banned from running for re-election. Appointed superintendents, who are already subject to dismissal, would be automatically fired. The policymakers are saying that school superintendents in the state of Mississippi will be held accountable for their failing schools (McNeil, 2008).

The duties and responsibilities associated with school leaders continued to grow with a greater emphasis on politics. Today, superintendents are expected to have a working knowledge of every aspect of their school district, with the greatest being accountability in the area of student performance (Madaus, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Around 1980, the state of Mississippi was set for reform in education and, most importantly, in school accreditation. Due to continued low student achievement and failure to meet minimum accreditation standards, some public schools in the state have been taken over by the State Board of Education. During the 1999 legislative session, The Mississippi Student Achievement Act was passed; the goal of the act required the State Board of Education to create a high-quality school evaluation and improvement system. The State Board of Education was also charged with implementing a performance-based accreditation system for both individual schools and school districts, setting annual performance standards for each of the schools in the state, and measuring the performance of each school against itself by using student growth and performance measures (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

In the state of Mississippi, all stakeholders within the school community, students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members are held accountable for student learning. Policymakers are empowered under the law to remedy schools' and school districts' shortcomings by removing educators who are not providing instruction in a way that enhances student achievement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

A report published December 10, 2008, revealed that most Mississippi school districts are accredited, meet at least minimum standards, are following proper processes, and the students are learning. However, there are 12 school districts in the state of Mississippi that are presently under sanction or under probation (*Mississippi Daily Journal*, 2008). In the state of Mississippi, sanctions are in three levels under the state's education standards:

·   Accredited is assigned to a district that complies with 100% of the process

standards.

·   Advised is assigned to a district that has process standards deficieinces;

under this level the district is required to develop a corrective action plan.

·   Probation is assigned to a district that was assigned and advised status the

previous shcool year, and the district has not taken corrective actions.

·   Withdrawn accreditation is assigned to a district that has previously been

assigned a probation status and still does not comply with its corrective

action plan. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005, p. 2)

Senate Bill 2405, Children First Act of 2009, has developed a task force that will

study under-performing schools and school districts in the state (Mississippi Department

of Education, 2008b). School superintendents and school board members have become

the focus of where the root of the problem begins when it comes to failing schools. The

politicians in the state of Mississippi have taken an initiative to intervene in the

accreditation and accountability process. This study examined the perceptions of

superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation and the impact of

accreditation standards in the state of Mississippi.

<div align="center">Research Question</div>

Significant legislative mandates that have passed in the last 20 years have been

instrumental in establishing the current public school accreditation model and

accountability system. As previously stated, politicians in the state of Mississippi have

taken an initiative to intervene in the accreditation and accountability process. Legislation

signed May 12, 2008, by Governor Haley Barbour stated that superintendents of school

districts that are labeled under-performing as measured by the state accountability system for 2 consecutive years could lose their jobs. Elected superintendents would be removed by the governor and banned from running for re-election. Appointed superintendents, who are already subject to dismissal, would be automatically fired. The policymakers are saying school superintendents in the state of Mississippi will be held accountable for their failing schools (McNeil, 2008). This study examined the perception of school superintendents in the state of Mississippi toward the criteria used in determining accreditation of public schools and the impact the state standards of accreditation has on schools.

This study also included how the perceptions of superintendents are related to specific demographic characteristics of other superintendents and their school districts. Moreover, the perceptions of superintendents were categorized by size of school district and each superintendent's position, elected or appointed. The following research questions were developed to conduct this study:

1. Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents of school districts with less than 1,200 students, districts that range between 1,200 and 5,000 students, and districts that have a population greater than 5,000 students, toward criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation?

2. Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents who are elected or appointed regarding criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi Standards of Accreditation?

Definition of Terms

Academic year - the amount of time that must be scheduled in the educational calendar and consists of a minimum of 180 teaching days. Two of the 180 days may be 60% days provided that there are 198 minutes of actual instruction and the remainder of each day is used for professional development, testing, or both.

Accountability system - the entire process that holds students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards accountable for student achievement. The accountability system includes the statewide assessment system and individual student accountability standards such as grade level benchmarks and graduation requirements. This system also includes an accreditation model that has rewards and sanctions for both school districts and individual schools, and procedures for interventions in priority schools and schools that fail to improve over a period of time.

Accreditation standards - the performance-based accreditation system for public schools that holds school districts accountable for process standards and individual schools accountable for performance standards, which is the growth and achievement of all students

Accreditation status - the annual status for a school district assigned by the Commission on School Accreditation and approved by the State Board of Education based on compliance with process standards using verified accreditation documentation from the previous school year. The accreditation statuses for the state of Mississippi are Accredited, Advised, Probation, and Withdrawn.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - the model or formula specified in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for determining whether schools and school districts have met annual achievement criteria.

Administrator - any staff member employed by a school board who is assigned the responsibility for coordinating, directing, supervising, or otherwise administering programs, services, and personnel under the guidelines of the program, school, or district.

Advised accreditation status - an accreditation status assigned to a school district that has a verified process standard deficiency on record from the previous school year.

Annual accreditation statuses - assigned in the fall of each school year and based on verified accreditation data from the previous school year.

Annual performance classification - the performance classification assigned to a school and determined by the percentage of students at the school who are performing at criterion levels basic and proficient. It also includes the degree to which student performance has improved over time based on an expected growth value for the school. The results from the Achievement Model and the Growth Model are combined to assign each school a school performance classification.

Basic skills - specific learning objectives that represent the most fundamental knowledge in the areas of reading, language arts, and mathematics.

Benchmarks - statement of what students are expected to know and be able to do by a certain grade level or point in time in their educational program as specified in the Mississippi Curriculum Framework.

Correction action plan - a plan to correct deficiencies on record that have been developed by the Mississippi Department of Education, in conjunction with the school district, when a school district is assigned an Advised or Probation accreditation status.

Criterion reference test - a test designed to reveal what a student knows, understands, or can do in relation to specific performance objectives.

Deficiency - the failure of a school district to comply with an accreditation requirement.

District level accreditation - the accreditation status of all public school districts based on compliance with process standards. These standards are determined annually by the Commission on School Accreditation.

Effective instruction - a process that fosters practices and behaviors designed to establish and implement conditions that promote student learning.

Elementary school - an educational instruction labeled as primary, elementary, and intermediate that includes individual grade level kindergarten through sixth and seventh, and eighth grade levels.

Evaluation - a formal appraisal or assessment of educational experiences which includes the performance of schools, educational programs, personnel, and students.

Grade level proficiency standards - a performance standard that establishes the percentage of students proficient in each school based on a demonstrated range of performance in relation to content as reflected in the Mississippi Curriculum Framework.

Mississippi statewide assessment system - a program of statewide assessment developed to improve the operation and management of public schools by providing

educators, parents, students, legislators, and the general public with meaningful achievement data from the school, district, and state levels.

Norm referenced test - provides information about the performance of examinees relative to other examinees.

Principal - an individual who is responsible for the total program of a school and who holds valid and appropriate administrator certification.

Priority school - a school-level performance classification that indicates a school has not achieved its annual growth expectation and has not achieved the percentage of students proficient on grade level, as required by the State Board of Education.

Probation status - an accreditation status assigned to a district that was assigned an advised status the previous school year and did not take corrective actions or has not removed the process standard deficiencies that results in the advised status.

Proficiency - a criterion level based on the demonstrated range of performance in relation to content as reflected in the Mississippi Curriculum Framework.

School board - the policy-making body of a public school district.

School improvement plan - a plan that a Priority School is required to develop based on the findings of the evaluation team report and the results of a public meeting. the plan should be a collaborative process by the principal of the Priority School the superintendent of the local school district, the local school board, and a majority of the teachers of the school.

School performance classification - a classification assigned to a school based on student achievement and growth.

School performance standards - standards for individual schools based on student achievement data using established proficiency levels and a reasonable expectation for annual growth in student achievement.

Standards - criteria by which school districts and schools are assessed. The two types of standards used in the performance-based accreditation system are performance and process.

Subject area test - an assessment that measures content knowledge in the subject areas of Algebra I, English II, Biology I, and United States History.

Superintendent - the school board employee who is responsible for administering the operations and activities of schools within the district and for implementing the decisions of the school board.

Teacher - a person employed by the school district who is required by law to obtain a teacher's license from the State Board of Education and who is assigned an instructional area of work as defined by the Mississippi Department of Education.

Withdrawn status - the status of a school district when the accreditation of the school district is withdrawn due to noncompliance with the district's corrective action plan (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

Delimitations included:

1.   School superintendents in the state of Mississippi were the only participants used in this study.

2.   The study included 149 participants.

Assumptions

Assumptions surrounding this study include:

1.   All school superintendents were honest in their responses to survey

      questions.

2.   Anticipation of a reasonable amount of the surveys completed and

      returned.

3.   The results and the validity of the study were solely based on the degree to

      which the participants answer all questions honestly.

Justification

In the present education system today, standards and accountability are a constant

reality in which schools must operate. The magnitude of this reality is important in

highlighting school level entities that enhance students' success which will promote and

increase student achievement level. Having policymakers who relate, understand, and

recognize the characteristics that increase the opportunity for students' success on state-

mandated assessments is an important factor that fosters an effective educational system

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2008b).

Several studies have been done that relate to this topic. A study was done in New

Jersey that investigated the extent to which superintendents were prepared to carry out

responsibilities of their position within the guidelines established in the New Jersey

Professional Standards for School Leaders (Wasilewski, 2007). A study was conducted in

Virginia that examined the beliefs, perceptions, and opinions of superintendents toward

the criteria used in determining accreditation, the impact of accreditation standards, and

the actions state policymakers should take toward schools that fail to become accredited

(Mulligan, 2002). Another study examined the perceptions and beliefs of parent-teacher organization presidents regarding state accreditation of public schools. The focus of this study was on gathering opinions regarding what criteria should be included when determining a school's accreditation rating and the impact of state accreditation on schools (Shufflebarger, 2002).

In this study, the researcher examined the perceptions of superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation and the impact of accreditation standards in the state of Mississippi. In examining the perceptions of school superintendents, the findings could serve to determine or influence the extent of policymakers' views of educational standards and accuracy in the area of accountability and accreditation. The finding in this study also gives policymakers and the Mississippi Department of Education information that will help them develop an understanding of superintendents' perceptions of the state accreditation system and in realizing that school reform that is intended to impact accountability in the area of student achievement is very unlikely to happen without the input, opinion, and perception of school superintendents.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In the 1980s, raising standards in the major curriculum subjects gained

momentum in state and school districts within the United States. Since then, states have

put academic standards in place to clarify what students should learn and what teachers

are teaching. This process has helped teachers, principals, and district superintendents

make decision about developing effective instructional programs. State and local

standards have been put in place as part of schools' accreditation and accountability

process. This process is what holds teachers, principals, and even superintendents

accountable for student learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The purpose of

this chapter is to provide factual information that relates to the process of school

accreditations and accountability.

The literature relevant to this research is centered on the following concepts: an

overview of school accountability and accreditation past and present; Edward Deming's

Total Quality Management Philosophy; the accreditation and accountability process in the

state of Mississippi; the public education testing and assessment system; Initiatives on

Federal Reforms and Mandates for public education; the accreditation and accountability

process in various states; focus and review of related topics that are similar to this study;

and the superintendent's role in school accountability and the accreditation process.

Importance has been placed on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). This

chapter defines and provides details of NCLB on the state and national level and the

impact it has had on the education system in the state of Mississippi. The literature in this

chapter sets the foundation for examining school accountability and the accreditation process in the state of Mississippi.

Overview of Accountability Past to Present

Accountability is synonymous with responsibility. To be accountable is to be responsible for an outcome (Wilgoren, 2001). When it comes to education, accountability is ensuring that all students receive a quality education which provides them with the basic skills needed to graduate from high school and reach their highest learning potential, regardless of their socioeconomic status or family background. Basic skills are defined by outlining what students are expected to know at every grade level (Connecticut Department of Education, 2007).

Accountability, as interpreted by policymakers, teachers, and parents often mean different things. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University has defined accountability as encompassing five related elements: (a) consensus of standards that offer guidance to curriculum and instruction that provide benchmarks that measure student progress, and goals that are aimed at closing the gap among various sub-groups of students; (b) a number of valid assessment instruments that include standardized tests, portfolios of student work, and an evaluation plan that enables school communities to document students' progress and achievement across classes and schools; (c) providing a high-quality education is the responsibility of all stakeholders including teachers, administrators, school boards, parents, community members, policymakers, businesses, and universities; (d) line of communication that fosters strong leadership, skillful instruction, adequate finances, time for collaboration and reflection, and a system that promotes community involvement; and (e) a data system which allows school

communities to examine their educational process, formulate questions, reflect on intended outcomes, and take action to improve learning within a school culture that values continuous improvement (Carvin, n.d.).

Theoretical Foundation

After *A Nation at Risk* report of 1983, many school leaders focused on the quality management philosophy of William Edward Deming, which later became known as Total Quality Management. Deming believed that when using his philosophy an "organization will become more successful." School leaders saw this as a pathway to school improvement. Research indicates that Deming's philosophy relates to education in a way that "creates consistency, adapts a cooperative philosophy that promotes collaboration, provides training for all, improves constantly and forever, and implements effective leadership" (Gorton, Alston, & Snowden, 2007, p. 27).

History of Accreditation and Accountability Process in the State of Mississippi

The accreditation process for the state of Mississippi dates back to the early 1900s. The accreditation process was founded through the Institutions of Higher Learning and teacher associations. Accreditation for secondary education was put in place before elementary school were included in the process. The association appointed five members to a High School Classifying Committee and required this group to establish standards of classification, to form a system for grouping high schools, and to assure that they would be assigned to the appropriate group. In 1926, the Mississippi Education Association implemented the elementary schools accreditation process. The association created the Elementary School Accrediting Commission to perform the same duties in regulating programs for elementary schools that the High School Accrediting Commission did for

secondary schools. The elementary commission consists of 10 members. The two

commissions operated separately, with the purpose of regulating elementary and

secondary programs in White schools until 1949. The two commissions were

discontinued by the Mississippi Education Association, and the Mississippi Accrediting

Commission was formed (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

It was not until 1935 that an accreditation process was put in place for African-

American schools. The Mississippi Association for Teachers in African-American

Schools organized the Negro Accrediting Commission. Twelve years later, the

Mississippi Association for Teachers in African-American Schools became the

Mississippi Teachers' Association. This commission continued to work under the

renamed Teachers' Association. In 1959, the name changed to the State Accrediting

Commission. The first order of business for the group was to adopt the present rules and

regulations of the Mississippi Accrediting Commission (Mississippi Department of

Education, 2007).

The state of Mississippi has strived to improve student assessment, school

accreditation, and accountability standards in an effort to raise student achievement.

Legislation mandates that targeted students' achievement date back as far as 20 years.

The Mississippi Education Reform Act of 1982 is the landmark for creating the

accreditation model and accountability system used in the state public schools

(Mississippi Department of Education, 2007). Governor William Winter enacted the

Education Reform Act in the state of Mississippi in 1982. A task force was formed and

charged with designing a process that would assure a quality educational program that

enhanced learning for all children in the state of Mississippi. One of the main

developments of the Education Reform Act was that school districts establish accreditation levels (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

During past decades, the state of Mississippi has attempted to reform education by looking at the school accreditation process because there continues to be a great emphasis of looking at measures of quality rather than quantity. Many mandates made by state legislators during the past 20 years have been instrumental in creating the current public school accreditation model and accountability system used in the state. These efforts have established the state of Mississippi as a nationally recognized leader in the school improvement and accountability movement (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007).

According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2007), in ensuring the validity of the accountability system in the state of Mississippi, along with providing opportunity to improve student achievement, schools are only held accountable for the performance of students who have been enrolled for at least 70% of the school year. Students are held accountable and have to take responsibility for their own learning; therefore, based on their performance on the state test, administrators have to make the decision whether to promote or retain students. Therefore, accountability in the state of Mississippi falls in the hands of all stakeholders—teachers, principals, superintendents, parents, and students.

Public Education Testing and Assessment System

The accountability of public schools did not begin with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It did not begin with the Improving American's School Act of 1994 or the *Nation at Risk* report of 1983 (Nelson, 2005). The concept of school accountability appeared much earlier in the history of education. Accountability dates back as far as

1837 when Horace Mann became the head of the newly-formed Massachusetts State Board of Education. Mann's humanitarian impulse led him to abandon a highly promising career in politics in favor of education. In realizing the need for public support and public awareness of the educational problems of poor teaching, substandard material, inferior school committees, and pupil absences, Mann advocated for school reform and campaigned for education throughout the state of Massachusetts. His campaign was eminently successful, and schools improved across the state (Academics Research Extension, 2008).

Mann implemented a comprehensive survey that was used to evaluate students' achievement. This survey was also used to justify the funds that schools in the state of Massachusetts received (Kilpatrick as cited in Mulligan, 2002). Schools that were involved in the survey were ranked according to their achievement. The information obtained was published in Boston newspapers. The information published revealed that Boston schools ranked very low in achievement level (Katz as cited in Mulligan, 2002). In reference to the school achievement report, stakeholders in Boston had grave concerns. Teachers expressed concerns about the discrepancy between the test format and the instructional process. School administrators were concerned that the test results were being used to compare schools that had diverse demographics. Many were concerned with the test not being in accordance with the school curriculum. Overall, educators and parents worried that the assessment did not classify students fairly (U.S. Office of Technology Assessment as cited in Mulligan, 2002).

Systematic Testing

The impact of systemic testing changed the nature of educational assessment in the United States. Testing to measure students' achievement has become an instrument of public policy and a means to initiate change. By the 1870s, many states were using written tests, and the results were publicized in local newspapers (Tyack as cited in Mulligan, 2002). According to Mehrens and Lehmann (1987), it is the responsibility of school districts to hold school systems, administrators, and teachers accountable. It is important for school districts to exemplify for students, parents, and teachers the kinds and levels of achievements that should be expected. School districts should always work to provide quality education and effective learning outcomes for all students. Districts do this by keeping parents informed about students' progress toward the state standards.. Also, students, teachers, and school districts, as well as the state and nation, should be held accountable for the educational performance of all. Educational leaders should take part in the decision making by policymakers concerning all educational programs. Over the years, dissatisfaction with education and efforts for reform have ignited a growth in testing. Due to the dissatisfaction of compensatory education and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, glaring differences between standardized test performance of various sub-groups and that of middle-class students have been revealed (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1987).

Mandated Testing

From 1950 to 1990, growth in state-mandated testing programs increased tremendously. State-mandated assessment programs grew from one in 1960 to 32 by 1985. Minimum competency testing programs increased from one to 35 by 1985. By

1990, every state had some type of mandated testing program. Growth in testing has been attributed to reliance on tests to make critical decisions about children, such as entry and exit from kindergarten, promotion from grade to grade, placement in remedial programs, and graduation from high school (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1987).

A survey of the history of American education reveals that testing has been in American public education since the 19th century. The thought of accountability in reference to holding not only students, teachers, and principals, but also school district superintendents, accountable for student performance has impacted the view of educators on school accountability standards and the process. In the 19th century, schools tested students to see if they mastered what they were taught and, sadly, students who did not pass the test were left behind. It was the belief during this period that if a student failed to learn, it was the student's fault. The history of the testing process for the United States and Europe identifies that changes or adaptations in testing technology were directed at making the testing process more efficient, manageable, standardized, objective, easier to administer, and less costly in the face of increasing numbers of examinees (Mehren & Lehmann, 1987).

According to Ravitch (2002), during the first half of the 20th century, Edward Thorndike was determined to prove that education had the potential to become an exact science. He used the scientific process to prove that tests are a measure of academic performance, although he had no intention in using tests for purposes of accountability. Testing was used in school on a regular basis during this time, and there were no beliefs within the profession that tests should be used to hold educators accountable. By the late 1800s, written tests were used by many states. Since that time, systemic testing has

changed the assessment process. Assessment is the essential ingredient of accreditation and accountability is the key word in education today. Tests are used for assessment at the state level to monitor students' progress toward 100% proficiency. Many different tests are being used at the state level (Center for Public Education, 2007).

According to Darling (2004), assessments and tests are means to an end, not the end in itself. Assessment is a process used in academic programs to obtain information about student learning. Data from the assessment are collected and used to evaluate quality of students' learning. Testing is information for an accountability system; it is not the system itself. Effective education requires collecting data about the learning of students throughout their educational experience. There are two types of assessment that can be used in the process; they include formative and summative assessment.

Forms of Assessment

According to Herman and Baker (2005), formative assessment provides information of students' progress during a course of study. It can include weekly quizzes, tests, essays, or any other project the students may be involved in that deals with the concepts being taught. The results of formative assessments can be used to help teachers to evaluate how well students are learning a concept and to make revisions to the instructional process being used. Stiggins (2004) stated that "formative assessment is a day-to-day classroom assessment and the process has shown remarkable gains in student achievement" (p. 22). Some formative assessment is teacher-designed, but not all. Many book companies include in their packaging CD-ROMs of tests aligned to the chapters in their books which add technology to the instructional process. Also, test publishers have begun to supply assessments for use at intervals in the classroom that can be used as 6- or

9-week tests. These assessments are aligned to the state standards and tests that students

will take for accountability purposes (Herman & Baker, 2005).

Summative assessment is an evaluation of what students have learned at the end

of a study. The assessment is mainly administered at the end of a school year, or at certain

benchmark grades. The summative assessment process has received more criticism and

controversy than formative assessment. Standardized and high-stakes testing has risen to

the forefront in the past few years. In standardized testing, a test is administered and

scored in a predetermined standard manner (Popham, 1999). All students take the same

test under the same conditions at the same time within the same time frame. An example

of this is the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT); this test is given all across the state of

Mississippi on the same date and time. According to Wilde (2004), the test is

administered in this manner so results can be attributed to student performance and not to

differences in the administration or form of the test. In the state of Mississippi, the results

of standardized tests are compared across schools, districts, or states. Standardized tests

can be formatted in numerous ways. High-stakes testing results determine the fate of

students as they progress through school. High-stakes tests can be the leading factor that

determines a student's promotion from grade to grade or graduation from high school.

They are also used in the state testing process to document Adequate Yearly Progress

(AYP) in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act (Resnick, 2004).

There are also norm-referenced tests and criterion-referenced tests. With these

tests, individual students' achievement is compared to other norm groups of their peers.

The design is governed by the normal or bell-shaped curve (National Association of State

Board of Education, 2002). The curve-governed design of norm-referenced tests does not

compare the students' achievement to standards for what they should have learned or be able to do; instead, it compares students to other students who are assumed to be in the same norm group. The norms for the Iowa Test of Basic Skills include districts of similar sizes, regions of the country, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and type of school (National Association of State Board of Education, 2001).

According to Monetti and Hinkle (2003), when adopting a norm-referenced test it is important to know that the chosen norm will be useful when comparing students who are involved in the testing process. Therefore, the norm should be a recently developed instrument because populations change rapidly. A norm that has a small percentage of testers who speak English can become a norm with almost 50% English language learners in less than a 10-year interval before it is revised. Results of norm-referenced tests are reported in terms of percentiles: a score in the 80th percentile means that the student has done better than 80% of the others in the norm group. Percentile rankings are often used to classify and identify students for a number of academic programs including gifted and talented, regular, or remedial classes and AP classes for high school students. Norm-referenced tests can be frustrating to educators. Teachers become frustrated because concepts that are a part of their classroom instruction will most likely not appear on the test (Popham, 1999). According to Burley (2002), students cannot score at a high level without others achieving at lower levels. Norm-referenced tests make it mathematically impossible for all children to be above average.

According to Wilde (2004), criterion-referenced tests reveal how students achieve in comparison to state standards, unlike norm-referenced tests. It is possible for all students to achieve high scores as well as low scores. These type scores are possible

because students are not compared to other students. The focus is on the mastery of the

standards. Students' results are reported as basic, proficient, and advanced. The states of

Mississippi uses a criterion-referenced test to see if students have mastered the

knowledge and skills contained in the state standards. Criterion-referenced tests are

sometimes called standards-based tests, and the design is based on individual state

standards (Wilde, 2004). State standards are documentation of the skills that students are

expected to learn. Most state standards are lengthy, and it is impossible to test them all.

Therefore, test designers work with teachers and content specialists to condense the

standards to essential knowledge and skills for each grade level. The use of criterion-

referenced tests being sued by individual states has increased since the No Child Left

Behind Act of 2001 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Criterion-referenced tests are direct measures of achievement, knowledge, and

skills required by state standards. In the United States today, there are 44 states that are

using criterion-referenced assessments (Bracey, 2002). Thirteen states use hybrid tests,

which are single tests that are norm-referenced tests in percentiles with a nine-point scale

used for normalized test scores, and criterion-referenced tests which are ranked basic,

proficient, and advanced. This process is used to show at the same time where students

score in reference to standards or norm group. Iowa is the birthplace of the Iowa Test of

Basic Skills and is the only state in the nation that does not have state academic

standards. They use only norm-referenced tests (*Education Week*, 2006).

All standardized tests must have reliability and validity and must be fair without

being biased (Bracey, 2002). For a test to be reliable it must have evidence that if the

student takes it numerous times he or she will receive the same score or will fall within

the range of the previous score. Validity of a test is that it measures accurately what it is

supposed to measure. All tests should be unbiased and should be appropriate for all

students who take them, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status (Joint

Committee on Testing Practices, 2004). Tests that are used by states and school districts

are designed by commercial test publishing companies. Many states usually contract to

use their names on the tests and align them with their state standards. The state of

Mississippi, along with Florida, Alabama, and Nevada, is known for using the Stanford

Achievement, Terra Nova, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. These states use individual

tests to report Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind Act to

the U.S. Department of Education (Dickinson, Friedman, Hatch, Jacobs, Nickerson, &

Schnepel, 2002). The chance for errors that may occur during the administration and

scoring of tests is always great. States that administer these tests, including the District of

Columbia, believe that the chance for errors is a very small percentage for schools and

students. The testing industry is under pressure in meeting the requirements of NCLB.

States and school districts are looking for more and better tests (Stokes, 2005).

Testing Formats

Missouri was one of the first states to use the multiple-choice testing format that

was developed by Fredrick Kelly. Multiple choice soon became the standard test for many

state testing programs, including Mississippi (Mulligan, 2002). For the last half century,

educators in the United States have become familiar with the bubble tests. Students have

to answer a question with four possible choices to choose from and respond by filling in a

blank bubble. The students have to use a number two pencil to fill in the bubble. The

pencil is a conductor of electricity so that the answer sheets can be scored by machine

(Lemann, 1999). This type of test is called multiple-choice because the tester chooses one answer from four choices, and the tester does not have to give an individual response.

Years ago, it was common to criticize multiple-choice testing because it seemed reductive (Mitchell, 1992). Critics believed that the questions on multiple-choice tests were not a true measure of student knowledge because the focus of the questions was on memorized facts and did not foster thinking. From this concept, test designers were challenged to make more sophisticated multiple-choice tests. Multiple-choice tests have been revised and now require much thought; even notes and calculations are sometimes used before choosing an answer. Although multiple-choice tests have improved, there is still controversy in that they are limited in the kinds of achievement they can measure. Many critics are not in favor of multiple-choice tests because students are not asked to produce anything; they only have to recognize the right answers (Zucker, 2003).

Open-ended tests require students to give a short written response when answering questions, or a written essay may be required. Open-ended tests require more answers, unlike multiple-choice tests where the tester only has to select one correct answer. One advantage in administering open-ended tests is it gives students the opportunity to express their knowledge and apply critical thinking skills. By using an open-ended test format, teachers are also able to assess students' writing abilities (Zucker, 2003).

A strong advantage with open-ended tests is that scoring and evaluation require individual readers. Readers for open-ended tests are mainly professional educators or retired teachers. They use a common rubric for scoring essay tests. This makes essay tests more expensive to score than multiple-choice tests. Testing companies are working to design computer programs that will score essays (Sireci & Rizavi, 2000).

Performance assessment was very popular in the early 1900s. In performance assessment, students are presented with real-life challenges and they must come up with a solution. Problem solving and critical thinking are used in performance assessment. Students perform a task in the same manner it should be done in real life. Some disadvantages of performance assessments include the fact that the process is very timely, the assessments are difficult to standardize, and the expense is great (Mitchell, 1992).

Portfolios are a type of performance assessment and have been used for many years, even before the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was enacted. A portfolio is a collection of student work. Its purpose is to show a student's growth for a term or a school year. Disadvantages include the fact that portfolios are not easy to evaluate accurately, and the material and contents of a portfolio cannot be standardized. Portfolios and performance assessments are used as formative assessments (Gearhart, Herman, Baker, & Whittaker, 1993).

Initiatives, Federal Reforms, and Mandates for Public Education

In the early 1960s, data relating to enrollment and graduation rate compiled by the federal government were important to the education process. With the concerns regarding civil rights and the launching of Sputnik, many questions surfaced concerning the quality of education in America. The federal government responded to stakeholder questions through the enactment of various initiatives (Tyack as cited in Mulligan, 2002).

Coleman Report

The Coleman Report provided information to policymakers that allowed them to use standardized test results not only for information about the condition of American education, but also as a yardstick against which to judge the impact of compensatory

programs such as Head Start and Title I. In 1966, the Coleman Report became a landmark

study. Equality of Educational Opportunity, led by James Coleman, was instrumental in

promoting racial balance between schools. In a presentation, Coleman and Ernest

Campbell informed the U.S. Congress that poor Black children did better academically in

integrated middle-class schools (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1987).

  Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requested that a survey be used to identify

the lack of availability of equal educational opportunity based on race, color, religion, or

national origin in public educational institutions at all levels. Preceding authorization of

the Civil Rights Act, Coleman studied 600,000 children who were from 4,000 different

schools across the United States (Schugurensky, 2002). The study found that there was no

difference in students' race within the school, one race was the majority. Further,

schooling between White and minority schools was similar. Teachers' training, salaries,

and the curriculum were somewhat equal. The results revealed that minority children

were behind compared to Whites and the gap became greater by the high school years.

The study revealed that academic achievement was highly impacted by family

background and that the educational process that was in place formed a large gap between

the academic achievement between Whites and Blacks. Studies done by Coleman had a

great impact on government education policy. Coleman's findings were confirmed

through a study that was done by the Civil Rights Commission on Racial Isolation in

Public Schools. The federal government passed a law to racially integrate public schools.

This action outlawed neighborhood schools. The goal was to achieve racial balance

between schools by preventing Black enrollment from reaching 60% or above

(Schugurensky, 2002).

Elementary and Secondary School Act

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESSA) was born. The

Commissioner of Education, Francis Keppel, introduced and designed the ESSA. The act

was enacted less than 3 months after it was introduced. This act was the main component

of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Through ESSA, special funding, known

as Title I, provided resources to meet the needs of children who were not receiving a

quality education (Schugurensky, 2002).

The Elementary and Secondary School Act, section 201, identified the educational

needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families

have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational

programs. In the ESSA, Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States to

provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with

concentrations of children from low-income families. The ESSA also included provisions

to expand and improve educational programs by various means, including preschool

programs which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally

deprived children (Schugurensky, 2002).

The passing of the Elementary and Secondary School Act was a major

accomplishment for President Lyndon Johnson. Congress had tried to pass bills to

improve education opportunities for all children in America since 1870. The passing of

the ESSA opened doors for thousands of young children who were in need of early

intervention prior to entering grade school. The act also provided assistance to 5 million

children from poor families that lived in poverty. President Johnson (1966) stated, "No

other legislation could help so many for so little cost, for every billion dollars spent on the

program the return will come back tenfold as school dropouts changed to school graduates" (p. 407). The assumption behind ESSA was challenged by the Coleman Report of 1966. However, everyone did not feel that providing quality education services for the poor would decrease the poverty level. The Coleman Report argued that school improvements, higher quality of teachers, curriculum, facilities, or even compensatory education had only a modest impact on students' achievement (Marvin, 1987).

The enactment of the Elementary and Secondary School Act was political. Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Johnson had a great desire to continue the movement of equal rights for all; therefore, he responded to civil rights pressures and religious conflicts over education by connecting educational legislation to his War on Poverty (Hugh, 1984). In 1964, Keppel developed a process that would decrease poverty and win the War on Poverty. The first was to provide general aid to public schools, but he argued that this could cause a problem with Catholic schools. The second was to provide general funding to public and private schools. This could create a negative response from the National Education Association and the Democratic Party which felt that federal aid should not be allocated to religious schools. The third option was to emphasize educational aid to poor children and not provide general aid. Keppel believed that this method would be supported by diverse groups (Schugurensky, 2002).

According to Spring (1993), the Elementary and Secondary School Act had three major consequences for future legislative action. First, it guided the switch from general federal aid for education toward categorical aid and connected federal aid to national policy concerns, including poverty and economic growth. Second, ESSA identified the religious conflict by linking federal aid to educational programs that impacted poor

children in parochial schools and not the institutions in which they enrolled. Third, a

strong dependence was placed on the state departments of education to allocate federal

funds. The Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 was amended in 1968 with

Title VII. Through this amendment, the Bilingual Educational Act was developed. This

act offered federal aid to local school districts to provide services to children with limited

English-speaking ability. The act was authorized through 1970, and the federal

government has reauthorized ESSA every 5 years since it began (Schurgurensky, 2002).

<center>A Nation at Risk</center>

Today, as well as 26 years ago, the nation continues to be at risk. Society and

educational institutions across the nation seem to have lost the vision concerning the main

purpose of education and the high expectations and disciplined efforts needed to assure a

quality education for all children. In the late 1900s, the first major milestone of education

reform developed with the *A Nation at Risk* report. The report was a document that

outlined the critical state of affairs surrounding the nation's K-12 educational system. The

report focused on low basic comprehension rates to high dropout rates. *A Nation at Risk*

became a popular report for administrators and policymakers who began the journey for

education reform (Carvin, n.d.).

On August 26, 1981, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell developed the National

Commission on Excellence in Education. The goal of the commission was to examine the

quality of education in the United States and to make a report to the nation within an 18-

month time period (Carvin, n.d.). In accordance with the secretary's instructions, this

report contained practical recommendations for educational improvement. Bell was very

concerned with the negative perception the public had of the nation's educational system

in comparison to that of other nations. The commission reported to the American people that as a nation there is justifiable pride in what schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people. Still, the educational foundations of society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens the future of the people of the United States. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—other countries are matching and surpassing the United States educational attainments (Carvin, n.d.).

The commission addressed specific changes that reflected the nation's educational system. These changes include (a) assessing the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities; (b) comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations; (c) studying the relationship between college admission requirements and student achievement in high school; (d) identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college; (e) assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and (f) defining problems which must be faced and overcome if the U.S. is to successfully pursue the course of excellence in education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The nation's success and prosperity goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of people which knit together the very fabric of society (Carvin, n.d.). The people of the United States need to know that individuals in society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to the new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not just from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to

participate fully in what the nation offers. A high level of shared education is essential to

a free democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country

that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom. Carvin (n.d.) believed that

regardless of race, class, or economic status all are entitled to a fair opportunity and the

right to tools that will allow them to develop and acquire individual powers of mind and

spirit.

<p style="text-align:center">Improving America's Schools Act (1994)</p>

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), Public Law 103-382, was

passed. Due to this legislation, policymakers reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary

School Act that originated in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty. The act targeted schools

across the United States. The IASA authorized that children by virtue of their own efforts

can attain gainful employment and manage their lives in ways that will be productive for

them as well as society (Carvin, n.d.). Under the IASA, states with a high population of

low socioeconomic families received federal funds to supplement and enhance the

educational services offered to children. The amount of funding a school receives is based

on the number of students within the school who are a part of the free or reduced lunch

program. About 95% of the schools across the nation receive these funds (Billig, 1998).

Upon signing the Improving America's School Act of 1994, President Bill Clinton

discussed his administration's educational initiatives. His social and economic goals were

to improve the learning capacities of American youth in a way that would enable them to

meet the challenges of a complex future. The new act gave local school communities

more responsibility in setting educational standards (Weekly Compilation of Presidential

Documents, 1994).

Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In the revised text of the latter act, Title X, Part A, Section 10101 defines the Fund for the Improvement of Education. The IASA is authorized to support nationally significant programs and projects to improve the quality of education, assist all students to meet challenging state content standards, and challenge state student performance standards, as well as contribute to achievement of National Education Goals (Brown, 2005).

Funds under the Improving America's Schools Act may be used for activities that will promote systemic education reform at the state and local levels, such as research and development that deal with challenging state content. The act provides a process for the development and observation of strategies for assessing students' learning. Also, the act provides in-service for teachers and administrators and promotes development of parent and community relations for all stakeholders. The act enforces strategies that eliminate ability grouping practices, provides policies and educational programs that offer college preparatory opportunities, creates a process that evaluates strategies for integrating instruction and assessment tht allow teachers and administrators to focus on students' educational needs at particular grade levels, provides for public school choice and school-based decision making, and studies and evaluates different education reform strategies and innovations being enforced by the federal government (Brown, 2005).

In a collaborated effort to put all the pieces of the Improving America's Schools Act together, the following are important pieces to the puzzle and must be positioned correctly: standards and assessments, enriched and accelerated curriculum, professional development, school-wide efforts, flexibility for local initiative, parent involvement

component, shared responsibility, accountability for student performance, and many other details associated with its implementation. Educators must not lose sight of the importance of increasing children's learning. All educators, as well as policymakers, must set the bar to raise expectations of all children and, most importantly children placed at risk. The visions of such beliefs have been documented in many school reform programs (Plunkett, 1997).

No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. Provisions of this federal legislation require that specific assessments be given to all students in schools across the United States and that individual states establish one system of accountability for all schools (Delisio, 2002). This act also reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states and school districts, as well as giving parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend (Madaus, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act was designed to reduce the gap in achievement between specific groups of students and to ensure that all students develop basic skills in reading and mathematics. All states must administer tests annually in mathematics and language for grades 3-8 and in high school. In order to measure the progress in closing the achievement gap and to assure that students are being given a quality education, each state has established its own testing programs and criteria for students' performance (Madaus, 2007).

NCLB requires states to classify all students into one of the following categories: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and, by default, Failure. The federal government uses these classifications to hold schools accountable for improving student performance each year for each of the following categories of students: English as a Second Language (ESL), those with disabilities, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, African American, Hispanic, and White. Schools that fail to meet these improvement goals for one or more sub-groups face closure or state takeover. It is consequences such as these that make these high-stakes tests (Madaus, 2007).

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been a greater focus on standards-based school accountability. In past years, there has been great pressure placed on teachers being accountable for students' performance. Since the new implementation of the NCLB Act, the focus has changed to school leaders and their ability to lead in a way that produces a quality and successful educational experience for all students and one that guarantees that all students are receiving the basic skills needed, which produces positive results and performance on state tests (Delisio, 2002). Although the goal of NCLB was to increase students' achievement and reform school accountability, reauthorization of the act has received strong criticism, and its weaknesses have resulted in major flaws within school systems. The provisions of Annual Yearly Progress as part of No Child Left Behind have been viewed as rigid. Other criticism of the act is that the definition of highly qualified under NCLB has conflicts with many state certification practices. To be highly qualified, a teacher must hold a bachelor's degree, have certification or licensure to teach in the state of their employment, and have proven knowledge of the subject content for which they are providing instruction (Delisio, 2002).

Students with learning disabilities must participate in general education curriculum and achieve at a proficient level when provided high-quality instruction by trained professionals along with appropriate accommodations. Students identified and served under the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) category of Specific Learning Disabilities must be provided full participation and equal accountability under NCLB (Delisio, 2002).

Mississippi schools are doing well as part of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The state has made provisions to improve curriculum, assessment process, and the overall accountability system of the state. As part of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Mississippi accountability system must challenge academic content and achievement standards, assure that standards are aligned with the assessment process, and conduct annual assessments of student achievement in grades 3-8 and high school (Mississippi Department of Education, 2008a). Only 6% of the schools in Mississippi did not meet their progress requirements in 2005-2006. The 2005-2006 test scores were quite impressive despite the problems and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which affected Mississippi just after school started that year. There were marked improvements in reading and language, as well as math in the elementary grades. Additionally, middle and high school students also showed slight improvement. Despite these test improvements, Mississippi was still ranked 49 of 50 in the "Smartest State" rankings, based on Morgan Quinto's annual reference guide *Education State Rankings* for the 2005-2006 school year. Over 70% of Mississippi students attend Title I schools. Title I schools are schools in low-income areas needing to focus son improving academic performance of its students. As a result of being labeled Title I, schools receive more federal funding (Mississippi

Department of Education, 2008a). The superintendent of Oxford public schools in

Mississippi believes that the manner in which his districts utilized their title funds played

a major role in the increase of student achievement (Vail as cited in Mulligan, 2002).

In carrying out the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, the state of

Mississippi is building a foundation that ensures that schools and districts that do not

show an increase in student achievement are held accountable. Under the NCLB Act, all

students are expected to perform at the proficient level in reading and mathematics by

2014. Students in Mississippi are measured using performance standards that have been

designed by Mississippi teachers. Classroom teachers in the state also developed the

content standards that are defined in the Mississippi Curriculum Frameworks (Mississippi

Department of Education, 2008b).

<div align="center">Accreditation and Accountability System in Various States</div>

Many states are working to hold all public schools accountable for student

performance and achievement. As previously stated, accountability is interpreted in

different ways by policymakers, teachers, parents, principals, and superintendents. Public

school accreditation and accountability are similar. The Annenberg Institute for School

Reform at Brown University describes accountability as: (a) standards that offer direction

to curriculum and instruction and provide benchmarks in specific grades that are used to

measure student progress; (b) the use of different assessment instruments that are rigorous

and used by many districts to document students' progress and achievement across

classes and schools; (c) responsibility that is distributed among all stakeholders, not just

teachers, administrators, and school boards but also parents, community members,

policymakers, businesses, and universities; (d) availability of resources and conditions

that provide strong leadership, skillful instruction, adequate finances, time for collaboration and reflection, and community involvement; and (e) a process for the continuous and reflective use of data, which gives schools the resources needed to evaluate their practices, implement action, and formulate plans to improve learning with schools (Carvin, n.d.).

Along with the No Child Left Behind Act, many new education initiatives were developed in 2001. The governor of California announced a plan to extend the academic school year 30 days for middle school students and teachers. Also in 2001, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani proposed weekend classes for students, while the governor of the state proposed that the school day should be longer to increase instructional time (Wilgoren, 2001). In New York City, the Office of Accountability's mission is to improve academic outcomes for all New York City Public Schools. To accomplish this, the system encourages principals, teachers, parents, and students to use evaluative and support tools, data, and research to accelerate teaching (New York City Department of Education, 2007).

The state of California has a comprehensive accountability system that monitors the academic achievement of all the schools in the state, including charter schools. The California Department of Education reports both state and federal accountability results under the general heading of the Accountability Progress Reporting System (ARP). Their system is based on state requirements established by the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 and mandates established by the No Child Left Behind Act (California Department of Education, 2008). In past years, there has been an increase in after-school programs that are funded by the federal government. Many schools have also reviewed

the possibility of implementing a 12-month contract for all teachers to increase professional development (Wilgoren, 2001).

The state of Texas uses the Texas Assessment of Academic Skill (TAAS). All students in grades 3-11 are assessed in the spring of each school year. State policymakers have used rewards and sanctions in dealing with failing schools. Some of the sanctions include firing principals if students' performance on state tests is not good. The district superintendent and school board also face sanctions if the school district performance level is low (Mulligan, 2002). Education Secretary Rodney Paige praised the state of North Carolina for putting an accountability system in place that is conducive to learning for all children. In Kentucky, the courts disbanded the system being used due to its ineffectiveness and ordered that a new system be put in place. The new system includes additional resources and available professional school consultants. In 1998, Kentucky began using the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS). This system included using longitudinal data to accredit schools in the state (Mulligan, 2002).

The state of Florida uses the A+Plan as part of its accreditation process. In this process, schools are graded on an A-F scale. Multiple criteria are used in the grading process such as student performance on state tests, student absenteeism, suspension and expulsion, and student dropout rate. The state of Florida also focuses on sub-group performance on state tests as well as the general population which includes socioeconomic status, African American, White, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian. Schools must perform above the minimum criteria level in order to receive an A or B. Failing schools in the state that do not show improvement over a period of time face sanctions that are stated in the state plan (CREP as cited in Mulligan, 2002).

The goal of the Massachusetts public schools is centered on the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. The act's purpose was to hold schools accountable for at-risk students who were in great need of reform in their educational program. All students should demonstrate competence by passing English and math tests, known as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), in order to graduate from high school. The Massachusetts Department of Education requires high schools to schedule 28 days of testing, which amounts to 15% of the school year (Croes & Morgenstern, 2008).

<div align="center">Previous Studies and Related Topics</div>

The National Association of State Board of Education (2002) conducted the study *From Sanctions to Solutions* that focused on meeting the needs of low-performing schools. The purpose was to examine the importance of the term "underperforming school districts" as defined. The report also examined financial support as well as other types of support that are important in terms of school accountability. The report concluded that no school fails due to the fact that its students cannot succeed; achievement gaps are not an option at this day and time; at-risk students are a part of low-performing schools; and schools that do not have proper resources, standards, and accountability systems need to be refined as comprehensive school improvement systems.

A study done at Johns Hopkins University and Howard University in 2003, *Bringing the District Back In: The Role of the Central Office Improving Instruction and Student Achievement*, examined the role of the central office and its interaction with officials in the school district and how the two relationships affect school achievement and instruction. The findings of the study concluded that the central office's logistical

support is crucial for success and most underperforming schools improve without outside

help. Public schools should be creating a culture that values instruction and achievement

(MacIver & Farley, 2003).

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement and the U.S.

Department of Education (2006) conducted a study on the *Characteristics of Improved*

School Districts. The study was composite information from over 80 articles that

investigated the attributes of school districts and schools that have improved and

sustained improvement over time. The report findings indicated that school districts'

success and improvement depends solely on working with the many interrelated parts of

the education system that impact student achievement.

Mann (2008) conducted a study that focused on *The Role of the Superintendent:*

How States and Federal Accountability Initiative Influence Role Taking and Role

Making. In this study, Mann examined how the role of the superintendent is influenced by

state and federal accountability initiatives along with how superintendents utilize state

and federal accountability initiatives to create or enhance their own role. This study also

examined how superintendents respond to role taking in relation to state and federal

accountability mandates. The conclusion of the study showed that accountability

initiatives did not influence how the three superintendents assumed or created their roles.

Data indicated that background and prior experience were more influential than

accountability initiatives in how each superintendent assumed or created his or her role.

Mulligan (2002) conducted a very similar study when he looked at *The*

Perceptions of Superintendents Relating to State Standards for Accrediting Schools in the

State of Virginia. This study examined the beliefs, perceptions, and opinions of

superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation. The impact of accreditation standards and the actions state policymakers should take when schools fail to achieve state minimum test scores. The results supported that superintendents overwhelmingly favor the use of pass rates on state tests as part of multiple criteria for accreditation.

<div align="center">Public School Superintendents' Role from Past to Present</div>

The role of superintendence dates back to 1812 when the first state superintendence was established in New York. The duties of the first state superintendent included developing a plan for a common school system, reporting the management of public funds, and providing school-related information for the state legislature (Kowalski, 1999).

In the 1830s, the common school movement began and lasted for almost 20 years. During this era individual states developed an office of state superintendent. The goal of the movement was to design an educational system for elementary and secondary grades that could function on the state level. From this movement, Spring (1993) discovered three specific domains that were different from former educational developments. According to Spring, the movement focused on educating all children, using schools as an instrument of government policy, and creating state agencies to control local schools. The profession of school superintendency derived from components of the common school movement.

The United States is known for local school districts, and the root of the system is based on liberty and equity. Local school superintendents came on the scene around the mid-1800s. In implementing the school superintendent's office, conflicts developed with

policymakers. Policymakers feared that school superintendents would not manage the power awarded to them effectively. During the early development of the school superintendent post, some cities disbanded the post and then reinstated the past. In the early years of establishing the school superintendent post, politicians and superintendents were on a collision course concerning the professional role of the office (Kowalski, 1999).

From the early era of the superintendency origin to the 1900s, the reasonableness of the school's high office was rooted in expectation and the school board's view of an efficient leader who would carry out orders and be an effective manager. The superintendent was charged with having knowledge of procedures that could carry out small tasks such as loading school buses to major duties such as implementing programs that would provide effective instruction with a sound curriculum that would improve individual students' learning as well as the overall school district. Superintendents were also charged with being active outside of the school in a way that promoted a positive relationship between the school and the community (Cuban as cited in Mann, 2008). During this time, professional leaders who had similar interests and values joined together for training that offered information that would give them tools to build a life-long career as superintendents in the education system, leaders in state and federal offices, leaders in professional organizations such as the National Education Association, and leaders of national foundations. These superintendents shared a common belief in the educational system that goes beyond political politics (Tyack & Cuban as cited in Mann, 2008).

Major efforts to reform public education have placed emphasis on the instructional leadership role of school superintendents. "Initiatives like school-based management, deregulation, and competition with private schools raise expectations for superintendents to restructure school curriculum and implement new instructional strategies relevant in an age of information and change" (Kowalski, 1999, p. 129).

In the 1980s, the state of Mississippi was positioned for reform in education, specifically in the area of school accreditation. Communities across the state wanted emphasis placed on accrediting schools to be altered in a way that would include quality more so than quantity. In the past 20 years, a series of significant legislative mandates have passed that have been instrumental in creating the current public school accreditation model and accountability system. In the state of Mississippi, public school superintendents' effectiveness is measured by the following performance standards:

- Standard A: An effective superintendent develops and leads an organization that directs and focuses all stakeholders on academic success for all students.

- Standard B: An effective superintendent develops a customer focused school system.

- Standard C: An effective superintendent develops the human resources within the school system.

- Standard D: An effective superintendent manages a school system efficiently and effectively.

- Standard E: An effective superintendent manages resources prudently and to the benefit of the instructional program. (Mississippi Department of Education, 2003, p. 1)

As of 2008, accountability of student performance had transferred to state superintendents. As previously stated, the positions of superintendent began to evolve as a formal position in the mid-1800s, mostly in large cities. The early responsibilities associated with the position were mainly clerical. By the mid-20th century, training programs began to emerge focusing on the business and technical aspects of the job. The duties and responsibilities associated with the position continued to grow with a greater emphasis on politics. Today, superintendents are expected to have a working knowledge of every aspect of their school district, with the greatest being accountability in the area of students' performance on state tests (Madaus, 2007).

Politicians in the state of Mississippi have taken an initiative to intervene in the accreditation and accountability process. Legislation signed May 12, 2008, by Governor Haley Barbour stated that superintendents of school districts that are labeled under-performing as measured by the state accountability system and accreditation model for 2 consecutive years could lose their jobs. Elected superintendents would be removed by the governor and banned from running for re-election. Appointed superintendents who are already subject to dismissal would be automatically fired. The policymakers are stating that school superintendents in the state of Mississippi will be held accountable for student achievement and their districts' failing schools (McNeil, 2008).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides the methodology process used to examine superintendents'

perceptions of the accreditation process in the state of Mississippi, criteria used in

determining accreditation, and the impact of accreditation standards in the state. This

chapter includes an outline of the research design, participants involved in the study,

details of the instrument used, limitations that may exist, and procedures used for

collecting and analyzing data.

Research Design

This was a descriptive and inferential study. A quantitative approach was used to

gather data that describe the perceptions of Mississippi superintendents toward the

criteria that are used to establish a school's accreditation and the impact the accreditation

process has on schools. The main variables included district size and the superintendent's

position (elected or appointed). The following research questions were developed to

conduct this study:

1. Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents of school

   districts with less than 1,200 students, districts that range between 1,200

   and 5,000 students, and districts that have a population greater than 5,000

   students, toward criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public

   schools and the impact of Mississippi Standards of Accreditation?

2. Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents who are

   elected or appointed regarding criteria the state of Mississippi uses to

accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi Standards of

Accreditation?

Participants

The participants in this study included 149 superintendents in the state of

Mississippi who served in the public school system during the 2009-2010 school year.

Responses were received from 100 of the 149 superintendents who were mailed surveys.

Responses included 45 elected superintendents, which is 69% of the 65 who were mailed

surveys, and 55 appointed superintendents, which is 65% of the 84 who were mailed

surveys. Participants were informed that data received would be used for research

purposes only. All participants were assured that personal names and school districts

would not be revealed.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study has been previously used in a study conducted

by Dr. Daniel Mulligan (2002). A Questionnaire was developed to determine the

perception of superintendents in Virginia Relating to State Standards for Accrediting

Schools. Through written documentation, permission (Appendix A) was granted to the

researcher by Dr. Daniel Mulligan to use the instrument in this study.

The instrument consisted of three sections: Criteria, Impact, and Action, with a

total of 60 questions. These sections used a set of Likert scale responses that read *strongly*

agree, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The instrument

included three demographic questions. To confirm the validity of the instrument, the

researcher solicited input from several specialists at the Virginia Department of Education

who were experts in the area of accreditation and accountability. The instrument was

assessed to determine how well it measured what it was designed to measure (Mulligan, 2002).

The reliability of the instrument was pilot tested using a group of eight former Virginia superintendents. All participants received a cover letter, survey, and directions. The participants provided the researcher with an estimate of how long it took to complete the survey, feedback pertaining to clarity of the directions, and survey questions. The section of the instrument that investigated Criteria, Impact, and Action had Cronbach alphas that exceeded 0.7. A summary statistic of .7775 was reported, which demonstrated the reliability of the instrument (Mulligan, 2002).

For this study, the instrument (Appendix B) was adapted by the researcher. Only the section of the instrument that investigated Criteria used to accredit schools and the Impact state standards have on schools was used. Each section included 10 questions that used a set of Likert scale responses that read *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The section of the instrument that investigated Criteria reported a Cronbach alpha of .709. The section of the instrument that investigated Impact reported a Cronbach alpha of .783, which demonstrated the reliability of the instrument. The section that investigated Action that policy makers should take toward failing schools was not included in this study. Two demographic questions were used in the study regarding the size of the school district and superintendent's position–elected or appointed. Information from the demographic questions was used to make comparisons. Data were analyzed based on two demographic questions and the two major sections of the survey. Superintendents took approximately 10 minutes or less to complete the instrument

Procedures

This study examined the perceptions of all Mississippi school superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation and the impact of accreditation standards. The researcher examined how the perceptions of superintendents were related to specific demographic characteristics based on their school districts. Moreover, the perceptions of superintendents were categorized by the size of school district and superintendents' type of position, elected or appointed. The following research questions were developed to conduct this study:

1. Is there a difference between the perceptions of superintendents of school districts with less than 1,200 students, districts that range between 1,200 and 5,000 students, and districts that have a population greater than 5,000 students toward criteria the state of Mississippi used to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi Standards of Accreditation?

2. Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents who are elected or appointed regarding criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi Standards of Accreditation?

Before any data or surveys were sent, proper documentation required by The University Institutional Review Board was approved for conducting this study (Appendix C). Surveys used in this study were addressed and mailed to individual superintendents across the state of Mississippi. Included with the survey was a letter (Appendix D) with detailed instructions and the purpose of the survey. Also included was a self-addressed stamped envelope for superintendents to use in mailing the survey back to the researcher.

Once a sufficient number of surveys had been returned (at least 100), the researcher coded

and analyzed the data for results.

<div align="center">Analysis of Data</div>

All research questions were analyzed using an analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The .05 level of significance was used to identify a significance difference in the

perceptions of superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation of

schools and the impact of accreditation standards on schools in the state of Mississippi.

Descriptive statistics were conducted to analyze each question in order of importance that

superintendents were asked concerning their perceptions of the accreditation process in

the state of Mississippi. Section I, Criteria, consisted of questions 1-10 that focused on if

the state were to include multiple criteria when accrediting schools what criteria should

be used in this process. Section II, Impact, consisted of questions 11-20 regarding the

perceptions of superintendents toward the impact Mississippi accreditation standards

have on schools.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine Mississippi school superintendents'

perceptions of the criteria used in determining accreditation of public schools and the

impact of accreditation standards on schools in the state. All superintendents of public

schools in the state of Mississippi were mailed a survey to determine if there were

significant differences in their perceptions based on the size of the school district and

their job position being elected or appointed.

Demographics

The participants in this study included 149 superintendents in the state of

Mississippi who served in the public school system during the 2009-2010 school year.

Responses were received from 100 superintendents, representing 67% of the 149

superintendents who were mailed surveys. Responses included 45 elected

superintendents, or 69% of the 65 who were mailed surveys, and 55 appointed

superintendents, representing 65% of the 84 who were mailed surveys.

Of the 100 responses, 16% of the districts' population is less than 1,200 students,

70% have a student population that ranges between 1,200-5,000, with only 14% having a

student population greater than 5,000 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Frequencies of District Size and Superintendents' Position

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
District Size		
Less than 1,200	16	16.0
Range Between 1,200-5,000	70	70.0
Greater than 5,000	14	14.0
Superintendents' Position		
Elected	45	45.0
Appointed	55	55.0

Descriptive Statistics Criteria

The following findings address each question in order of importance that superintendents were asked concerning their perceptions of the accreditation process in the state of Mississippi. Section 1, Criteria, consisted of questions 1-10 that focused on, if the state was to include multiple criteria when accrediting schools, what criteria should be used in this process (see Table 2).

Question 1, Should performance on state tests be a part of multiple criteria for accreditation, had a mean of 4.41 and a standard deviation of .67. This indicates that superintendents in the state of Mississippi feel that it is important and agree that state test scores should be used in the accreditation process.

Question 4, Should the percentage of teachers endorsed in their content area or grade level be a part of the multiple criteria for accreditation, had a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of .849. This indicates that superintendents feel that it is important to include teacher endorsement as part of multiple criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 5, Should student attendance be included in multiple criteria when accrediting school, has a mean of 3.99 and a standard deviation of .827. This indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that school attendance should be included in criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 10, Should identification and services provided to special needs students be included in the multiple criteria, had a mean of 3.95 and a standard deviation of .874. This indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that providing for special

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Research Questions 1-10

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Performance on state test as part of criteria used	4.41	.67
Percentage of teachers endorsed in content or grade level	4.13	.84
Student attendance rates	3.99	.82
Services provided to special needs children	3.94	.87
The achievement gap between subgroups	3.82	.82
Student drop-out rate	3.80	.79
Technology access	3.68	.99
Building maintenance and upkeep	3.51	.99

Percentage of teachers holding advanced degrees	2.84	1.04
State test performance as the sole criteria	1.71	.81

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*

needs students is important and should be included in criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 7, Should closing the achievement gap between subgroups be included in multiple criteria when accrediting schools, had a mean of 3.82 and a standard deviation of .825, which indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that closing the achievement gap should be a part of criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 6, Should the student dropout rate be included in multiple criteria used in accrediting schools, had a mean of 3.80 and a standard deviation of .799 which indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that dropout rate should be included in the criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 9, Should technology access be included in multiple criteria when accrediting schools, had a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of .998 which indicates superintendents feel that technology access is not a major factor and neither agree nor disagree that it should be part of the criteria used in the accreditation process.

Question 8, Should building maintenance and upkeep be a part of the multiple criteria used in the accreditation process, had a mean of 3.51 and a standard deviation of .999. This indicates that superintendents do not feel that building maintenance is an important factor in the accreditation process.

Question 3, Should the percentage of teachers holding advanced degrees be part of the multiple criteria, had a mean of 2.84 and a standard deviation of 1.040. This indicates that superintendents disagree that the type of degree a teacher holds should be a part of the multiple criteria in the accreditation process.

Question 2, Should the performance on state test be the sole criteria used for school accreditation, had a mean of 1.72 with a standard deviation of .816. This indicates that superintendents strongly disagree that test scores should be the sole criteria used in the accreditation process.

Descriptive Statistics Impact

Section 2, Impact, consists of 10 questions, 11-20, regarding the perceptions of superintendents toward the impact Mississippi accreditation standards have on schools. The questions are listed in order of importance based on superintendents' perceptions, as shown in Table 3.

Question 15, The accreditation standards have encouraged superintendents to become more focused on instructional improvement, had a mean of 4.36 and a standard deviation of .644. This indicates that superintendents agree that the impact of standards is important in the area of instructional improvements.

Question 18, The impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation has increased stress for teachers and administrators, had a mean of 4.31 and a standard deviation of .911. This indicates that superintendents agree that standards used in the accreditation process have increased stress for teachers and administrators.

Question 14, The impact of accreditation standards has encouraged principals to become more focused on instructional improvement, had a mean of 4.31 and a standard

deviation of .720. This indicates that superintendents agree that principals have become

more focused on instructional improvement. Question 12, The impact of accreditation

standards has improved classroom instruction, had a mean of 3.97 and a standard

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Research Questions 11-20

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Encouraged superintendents to focus on improving instruction	4.36	.644
Increased stress for teachers and administrators	4.31	.911
Principals more focused on improving instruction	4.31	.720
Improved classroom instruction	3.97	.846
Improved students' learning	3.90	.875
Encouraged teachers to collaborate	3.74	1.011
Contributed to teacher transfer requests	3.38	1.007
Contributed to administrators' resignation	3.34	1.032
Contributed to superintendents' resignation	3.30	1.044
Increased money for instructional material	2.46	1.220

Scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*

Question 13, The impact of accreditation standards has improved students'

learning, had a mean of 3.90 and a standard deviation of .875. This indicates that

superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has

improved students' learning.

Question 11, The impact of accreditation standards has encouraged teachers to collaborate, had a mean of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 1.011. This indicates that superintendents did not agree or disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has encouraged teachers to collaborate.

Question 19, The impact of accreditation standards has contributed to the number of teacher transfer requests, had a mean of 3.38 and a standard deviation of 1.007. This indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has increased teacher transfer requests.

Question 16, The impact of accreditation standards has contributed to the resignation of school administrators, had a mean of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 1.032. This indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has caused school administrators to resign.

Question 17, The impact of accreditation standards has contributed to the resignation of district superintendents, had a mean of 3.30 and a standard deviation of 1.044. This indicates that superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has caused superintendents to resign.

Question 20, The impact of accreditation standards has increased the amount of money available for instructional material, had a mean of 2.46 and a standard deviation of 1.220. This indicates that superintendents disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has increased the amount of money available for instructional material.

Analysis of Variance Based on District Size

The following research questions were developed to conduct this study:

3.   Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents of school districts with less than 1,200 students, districts that range between 1,200 to 5,000 students, and districts that have a population greater than 5,000 students toward criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation?

4.   Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents who are elected or appointed regarding criteria the state of Mississippi uses to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation?

The researcher conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if there was a difference in the perception of superintendents in small school districts with less than 1,200 students, medium school districts between 1,200-5,000 students, or large school districts that have 5,000 or more students toward multiple criteria that should be used when accrediting schools in the state (see Table 4). On criteria used to accredit schools, superintendents of districts with a student population less than 1,200 had a mean of 3.55 and a standard deviation of .46. Districts with a student population between 1,200 and 5,000 had a mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of .45. School districts that have a student population greater than 5,000 had a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of .46. The results indicated that there were no significant differences in superintendents'

Table 4

Analysis of Variance of Superintendents' Perception of Criteria and Impact Based on the Size of School District

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Criteria	Less than 1,200	3.55	.46
	1,200-5,000	3.53	.45
	Greater than 5,000	3.67	.46
Impact	Less than 1,200	3.69	.64
	1,200-5,000	3.66	.53
	Greater than 5,000	3.99	.48

perceptions, $F(2, 97) = .525$, $p = .593$. An ANOVA was also conducted to determine if there was a difference in the perceptions of superintendents based on district size toward the impact standards of accreditation have on schools in the state of Mississippi (see Table 4). Superintendents' perception of impact of accreditation standards that have a student population less than 1,200 had a mean of 3.69 and a standard deviation of .64. Superintendents with a student population between 1,200 and 5,000 had a mean of 3.66 and a standard deviation of .53. Superintendents with a student population greater than 5,000 had a mean of 3.99 and a standard deviation of .48. Results indicate that there were no significant differences in the perceptions of superintendents based on the size of the school district toward the impact that Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools, $F(2, 97) = .2047$, $p = .135$.

Analysis of Variance Based on Superintendents' Position

The researcher conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if there

was a significant difference in the perception of superintendents based on position,

elected or appointed, toward multiple criteria that should be used when accrediting

schools in the state of Mississippi. Appointed superintendents were higher on the criteria

variable than elected, as shown in Table 5. Elected superintendents had a mean of 3.43

and a standard deviation of .45. Appointed superintendents' perception toward multiple

criteria had a mean of 3.65 and a standard deviation of .43. The results indicated that

there is a significant difference in the perception of superintendents based on their

position being elected or appointed toward multiple criteria used when accrediting

schools in the state of Mississippi, $F(1, 98) = 6.14$, $p = .015$. The difference was on

Table 5

Analysis of Variance of Superintendents' Perception of Criteria and Impact Based on Position Elected or Appointed

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Criteria	Elected	.343	.45
	Appointed	3.65	.43
Impact			
	Elected	3.75	.52
	Appointed	3.68	.58

dropout rate, building maintenance upkeep, and technology access. An ANOVA was also

conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the perception of

superintendents based on their position, elected or appointed, toward Mississippi (see

Table 5). On impact, elected superintendents had a mean of 3.75 and a standard deviation

of .52. Appointed superintendents had a mean of 3.68 and a standard deviation of .58.

The results indicated that there were no significant differences in the perceptions of

superintendents based on the superintendents' position, $F(1, 98) = .362$, $p = .549$.

There was a significant difference between elected and appointed superintendents'

perceptions toward multiple criteria that should be used in the state of Mississippi

accreditation process. The differences were on the following questions (see Table 6).

Question 6, Should student dropout rate be included in multiple criteria when

accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi? Appointed superintendents had a mean of

3.94 and a standard deviation of .68. Elected superintendents had a mean of 3.61 with a

standard deviation of .89.

Question 8, Should building maintenance and upkeep be included in multiple

criteria used in accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi? Appointed superintendents

had a mean of 3.71 and a standard deviation of .91. Elected superintendents had a mean

of 3.26 and a standard deviation of 1.04.

Question 9, Should technology access be a part of multiple criteria used in

accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi? Appointed superintendents had a mean of

3.85 and a standard deviation of .99. Elected superintendents had a mean of 3.45 and a

standard deviation of .91. Appointed superintendents were higher than elected

superintendents on the criteria variable.

Table 6

One-way ANOVA Descriptive of the Differences in the Perception of Elected and Appointed Superintendents Toward Multiple Criteria that Should be Used in the Accreditation Process

		Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' Dropout Rate	Elected	3.61	.895
	Appointed	3.94	.685
Building Maintenance and Upkeep	Elected	3.26	1.049
	Appointed	3.71	.916
Technology Access	Elected	3.45	.913
	Appointed	3.85	.998

Summary

The results of this study are as follows:

Perception of Superintendents toward Multiple Criteria: Superintendents agree that performance on state tests is very important and should be included in multiple criteria used when accrediting schools; however, superintendents strongly disagree that test scores should be the sole criterion used. There was no significant difference in the perception of superintendents based on the size of the district toward multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditation process.

On the criteria variable appointed superintendents were higher than elected superintendents. Therefore, the results indicated a significant difference in the perception

of superintendents who are elected and those who are appointed towards multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditation process. Superintendents' perceptions differ on students' dropout rate being included in multiple criteria for school accreditation. Superintendents also had a difference in their perceptions in building maintenance and upkeep and technology access being a part of multiple criteria used in accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi.

Perception of Superintendents toward Impact: Superintendents agree that current accreditation standards have encouraged superintendents to become more focused on instructional improvements. However, superintendents strongly disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has increased the amount of money available for instructional material. There was no significant difference in the perception of superintendents based on district size and position elected or appointed toward the impact Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Although much has been done, public schools are still lacking in the area of

accountability reform. Many states set their own achievement goals and standards for

which schools within their states are measured and then held accountable for students'

performance. In this study, the researcher examined the perceptions of superintendents

toward the multiple criteria used in determining the accreditation process in the state of

Mississippi and the impact accreditation standards have on schools in the state. The focus

of this chapter is to discuss and present findings of the analysis conducted in Chapter IV

and present conclusions. This chapter also presents recommendations for further study

surrounding the accountability process in the state of Mississippi.

Discussion

Superintendents in the state of Mississippi responded to a 20-item survey that

contained three sections. Section 1, Criteria, consisted of 10 questions concerning

superintendents' perception toward criteria used by the state in the accreditation process.

Section 2, Impact, consisted of 10 questions regarding the perceptions of superintendents

toward the impact Mississippi accreditation standards may have on schools. Section 3

consisted of two demographic questions that related to the size of the school district and

the superintendent's position (elected or appointed). Information from the demographic

questions was used to make comparisons. Data were analyzed based on two demographic

questions and the two major sections of the survey. The first two sections of the survey

used a set of Likert scale responses that read *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor*

disagree, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*. The second part of the survey consists of two demographic variables (superintendents' position elected or appointed and district size).

Section 1 Criteria: What is the perception of superintendents toward multiple criteria that should be used when accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi? Superintendents agree that performance on state tests should be part of multiple criteria used in the accreditation process as well as teacher endorsement in their content area or grade level. Superintendents neither agree nor disagree that student attendance rates, services provided to special needs students, closing the achievement between groups, and student dropout rates should be part of the criteria used in the accreditation process. Superintendents neither agree nor disagree that technology access or building maintenance upkeep should be part of multiple criteria used in the accreditation process. Superintendents disagree with including the percentage of teachers holding advanced degrees in the accreditation process and strongly disagree that performance on state tests should be the sole criterion used in the accreditation process.

Section 2 Impact: What impact do Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools in the state? Superintendents agree that due to Mississippi standards of accreditation superintendents and principals have become more focused on instructional improvement. Superintendents also agree that the impact of the accreditation process has contributed to increased stress for teachers and administrators. Superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has improved classroom instruction and students' learning. Superintendents neither agree nor disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has encouraged teachers to collaborate more or have contributed to the number of teacher transfer requests. Superintendents disagree that the

impact of accreditation standards has contributed to the resignation of school administrators and district superintendents. Superintendents strongly disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has increased the amount of money available for instructional material.

The researcher examined how the perceptions of superintendents were related to specific demographic characteristics based on their school districts. The perceptions of superintendents were categorized by the size of school district and superintendents' type of position—elected or appointed.

Analysis

The following research questions were developed to identify if there is a significant difference in superintendents' perception based on district size and position elected or appointed.

1.   Is there a difference between the perceptions of superintendents of school districts with less than 1,200 students, districts that range between 1,200 and 5,000 students, and districts that have a population greater than 5,000 students toward criteria the state of Mississippi should use to accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation?

There was no significant difference in superintendents' perception of multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditation process as well as the impact of Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools, based on district size.

2.   Is there a difference between the perception of superintendents who are elected or appointed regarding criteria the state of Mississippi used to

accredit public schools and the impact of Mississippi standards of

accreditation?

Overall, the appointed superintendents were higher on the criteria variable than the

elected superintendents. The results indicted that there was a significant difference in the

perception of elected and appointed superintendents toward multiple criteria used when

accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi. Superintendents had a difference of

perceptions on dropout rate, building maintenance upkeep, and technology access. The

appointed superintendents were higher than the elected superintendents. The views and

opinions of elected public school superintendents and appointed superintendents are often

diverse. This is mainly because of the process by which they obtain their position. Many

Mississippians believe that elected superintendents are not as qualified and not effective

leaders of education as appointed superintendents. This is mainly because of the

educational level that many appointed superintendents have as opposed to elected ones.

Looking at the difference of their perceptions in this study on student dropout rate,

building maintenance upkeep and technology access could be a result of that very fact.

There was no significant difference in the perceptions of elected and appointed

superintendents toward the impact Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools.

Conclusions

This study concluded that Mississippi public school superintendents agree that

students' performance on state tests should be a part of multiple criteria used in the

accreditation process. During the 2007-2008 school year, Mississippi administered the

Mississippi Curriculum Test II (MCT II) to students in grades 2-8. This test is designed to

measure students' Depth of Knowledge (DOK). In secondary schools in Mississippi,

students are given subject area tests in Algebra I, Biology I, English II, and U.S. History. Students in grades 4-6 are assessed in writing. Based on student performance on the state test, individual schools receive a performance classification. As of February 20, 2009, the State Board of Education granted approval to begin the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), a process for the proposed revisions of the State Accountability System (Massey, 2009). Recommendations from this act were that schools in the state of Mississippi be classified from highest to lowest performing; schools would be labeled Star School, High Performing, Satisfactory, Low Performing, Academic Watch, At-Risk of Failing, and Failing

Superintendents also agree that teacher endorsement in their content area, student attendance rate, providing for special needs students, and closing the achievement gap are important and should be part of multiple criteria used in the state of Mississippi accreditation process. The No Child Left Behind Act was designed to reduce the gap in achievement between specific groups of students and to ensure that all students develop basic skills in reading and mathematics. All states must administer tests annually in mathematics and language for grades 3 through 8 and in high school. This process was put into place to measure the progress in closing the achievement gap and to assure that students are being given a quality education. Each state has established its own testing programs and criteria for students' performance. NCLB requires states to classify all students into one of the following categories: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and, by default, Failure. The federal government uses these classifications to hold schools accountable for improving student performance each year for the following categories of students: ESL, those with disabilities, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, African

American, Hispanic, and White. Schools that fail to meet these improvement goals for one or more sub-groups face closure or state takeover (Madaus, 2007).

Technology access, building maintenance, and teachers holding advanced degrees do not hold much value in the perception of superintendents in reference to the state's accreditation process. Superintendents are strongly against using test scores as the sole criterion in the accreditation process. There was no significant difference in superintendents' perceptions of multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditation process as well as the impact Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools based upon district size.

Superintendents agree that the impact of accreditation standards has motivated them as well as principals to direct their focus on improving instruction for students. Research review indicated that since the early era the role of public school superintendents has changed significantly. The reasonableness of the school's high office was rooted in expectation and the school board's view of an efficient leader who would carry out orders and be an effective manager. Today's superintendents are charged with implementing programs that provide effective instruction with a sound curriculum that will improve individual students' learning as well as the overall school district (Cuban as cited in Mann, 2008).

Superintendents believe standards that are used in the accreditation process have caused stress for teachers and administrators. The stress level for teachers and administrators began to increase with the passage of The Mississippi Reform Act of 1982. This act was established to design a system that promoted quality educational programs in all schools in the state. One of the outcomes of this act was the formation of establishing

district accreditation levels based on school district performance. The system was performance-based accreditation that was based on qualities that displayed the extent to which schools provided instructions that allowed students to master the content and objective being taught (Bullard, 1998). With all of the changes that have come forth in the past decade concerning accountability and accreditation, superintendents agree that the impact of accreditation standards has improved classroom instruction and learning. Superintendents do not believe that state standards have had an impact on teacher collaboration or teacher transfers. Superintendents strongly disagree that the impact of accreditation standards has increased funding for instructional material.

Superintendents who are appointed had a different perception from those who are elected on the criteria variable. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in their perception toward multiple criteria used when accrediting schools in the state of Mississippi. Their perceptions were different on dropout rate, building maintenance upkeep, and technology access being a part of multiple criteria used in the accreditation process. Overall, the appointed superintendents were higher on the criteria variable than elected superintendents. There were no significant differences in the perceptions of elected and appointed superintendents toward the impact Mississippi standards of accreditation have on schools.

Most efforts to reform public education have placed emphasis on the instructional leadership role of school superintendents. "Initiatives like school-based management, deregulation, and competition with private schools raise expectations for superintendents to restructure school curriculum and implement new instructional strategies relevant in an age of information and change" (Kowalski, 1999, p. 129).

Limitations

The results of this study were limited to the number of surveys received from public school superintendents in the state of Mississippi. The results afforded information of the perception of superintendents toward multiple criteria that should be used in the accreditations process in the state of Mississippi and the impact state standards have had on public schools.

Recommendations for Policy or Practices

In this study, the researcher examined the perceptions of superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation and the impact of accreditation standards in the state of Mississippi. In examining the perceptions of school superintendents, the findings could serve to determine or influence the extent of policymakers' views of educational standards and accuracy in the area of accountability and accreditation. The findings in this study also give policymakers and the Mississippi Department of Education information that will help them develop an understanding of superintendents' perceptions of the state accreditation system and in realizing school reform that is intended to impact accountability in the area of student achievement is very unlikely to happen without the input, opinion, and perceptions of school superintendents.

As of 2008, accountability of student performance transferred to school superintendents. Therefore, the researcher recommends that the Mississippi State Department of Education along with policymakers acknowledge public school superintendents' perceptions and opinions when revising or seeking ways to reform the state's accreditation process. Also, a revised accountability model should be put in place

that is conducive to students' learning and is based on recommendations of school
leaders.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Future Research</div>

In recent years, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have worked to
improve accountability and accreditation standards in the education system by measuring
student performance and raising standards. These joint efforts have equipped
policymakers, educators, and parents with the tools needed to grade not only students but
also their schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). School superintendents and
school board members have become the focus of where the root of the problem begins
when it comes to failing schools. The politicians in the state of Mississippi have taken an
initiative to intervene in the accreditation and accountability process. This study
examined the perceptions of superintendents toward the criteria used in determining
accreditation and the impact of accreditation standards in the state of Mississippi. Further
research that investigates the perception of other stakeholders would enhance this study.
A study that examines the perception of the district school board members, school
administrators, teachers, parents, and students toward multiple criteria that should be used
in the accreditation process and the impact of school accreditation standards for public
schools in the state of Mississippi would provide a wide range of the perceptions of all
stakeholders. A qualitative study of superintendents' perceptions of the accreditation
process in the state of Mississippi would provide a more in-depth and precise outcome of
how superintendents really feel about the accreditation process in the state.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION TO USE THE INSTRUMENT

Daniel Mulligan, Ed. D.
1421 Rylands Road
Virginia Beach, VA 23455
June 29, 2008

Betty Merhundrew
12229 Breezeway Cr
Gulfport, MS 39503

Dear Sir or Madam:

As the culmination of my doctoral program at George Washington University, I completed a study titled, "Perceptions of Superintendents Relating to State Standards for Accrediting Schools." Betty Merhundrew a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi has requested permission to use the instrument used in my study. It is my intention that this letter serve notice to all concerned that Betty Merhundrew has my permission to use the requested instrument without reservation.
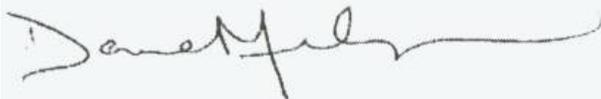
Daniel Mulligan, Ed. D.
President, Simply Achieve, Inc.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Criteria

The following statements relate to criteria that states use in order to accredit public schools. Place an X under the response that best reflects your views.

If the state were to include multiple criteria when accrediting schools, included in the multiple criteria should be:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Performance on state tests as part of multiple criteria for accreditation.					
2. Performance on state test as the sole criterion for accreditation.					
3. Percentage of teachers holding advanced degrees.					
4. Percentage of teachers endorsed in their content area or grade level.					
5. Student attendance rates.					
6. Student dropout rates.					
7. Closure of the achievement gap between majority and minority students.					
8. Building maintenance and upkeep.					
9. Technology access.					
10. Identification and services provided to special needs students.					

Impact

The following statements indicate the impact Mississippi Standards of Accreditation may have on schools. Please place an X under the response that best reflects your views as they relate to your school district.

The Mississippi Standards of Accreditation have:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. Encouraged teachers to collaborate.					
12. Improved classroom Instruction.					
13. Improved student learning.					
14. Encouraged the principal to become more focused on Instructional improvement.					
15. Encouraged the superintendent to become more focused on Instructional improvement.					
16. Contributed to resignation of school administrators.					
17. Contributed to resignation of district superintendents.					
18. Contributed to increased stress for teachers and administrators.					
19. Contributed to the number of teacher transfer requests.					
20. Increased the amount of money available for instructional materials.					

Demographics

After each question please mark only one response.

1.	As a superintendent in the state of Mississippi public education system, what type of position do you hold:

	_____ Elected _____Appointed

2.	Which statement best describes your school district?

	_____ Small (less than 1,200 students)

	_____ Medium (between, 1,200 and 5,000)

	_____ Large (5,000 students or more)

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Institutional Review Board

118 College Drive #5147
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Tel: 601.266.6820
Fax: 601.266.5509
www.usm.edu/irb

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION REVIEW COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
  Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 29082401
PROJECT TITLE: Superintendent Perceptions of The Accreditation Process for Public Schools in The State of Mississippi
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 08/01/09 to 12/01/09
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Betty Merhundrew
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 08/31/09 to 08/30/10

Lawrence C. Hosman   9-1-09
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.   Date
HSPRC Chair

APPENDIX D

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENTS

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR
12229 Breeezeway Cr. Gulfport, Mississippi 39503 ~ (228) 831-9366 /(228)-324-6258
Betty Merhundrew, Ed.S

May 30, 2009

Dear Superintendents,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Leadership and School Counseling at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting a study on Superintendents' Perceptions of the Accreditation Process in the State of Mississippi. In recent years, policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels have worked to improve accountability and accreditation standards in the education system by measuring student performance and raising standards. With the recent changes in the accountability system in the state, this study will examine the perceptions of school superintendents toward the criteria used in determining accreditation, and the impact of accreditation standards.

Although your participation in this study is voluntary, your perceptions will be greatly appreciated. Please complete the enclosed survey and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. All responses received will be kept anonymous and will be used for analysis purposes only by the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 228-324-6258 / 228-831-9366 or at merhundrew@yahoo.com. My dissertation chairperson is Dr. David Lee and he can be reached at 601-266-6062 or David.E.Lee@usm.edu. Thank you for your help and for making my study a success.

Sincerely
Betty Merhundrew, Ed.S

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