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Middle-Level Leaders Perceptions of Accountability

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MIDDLE-LEVEL LEADERS PERCEPTIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

by

Deena Cousar Brown

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2008

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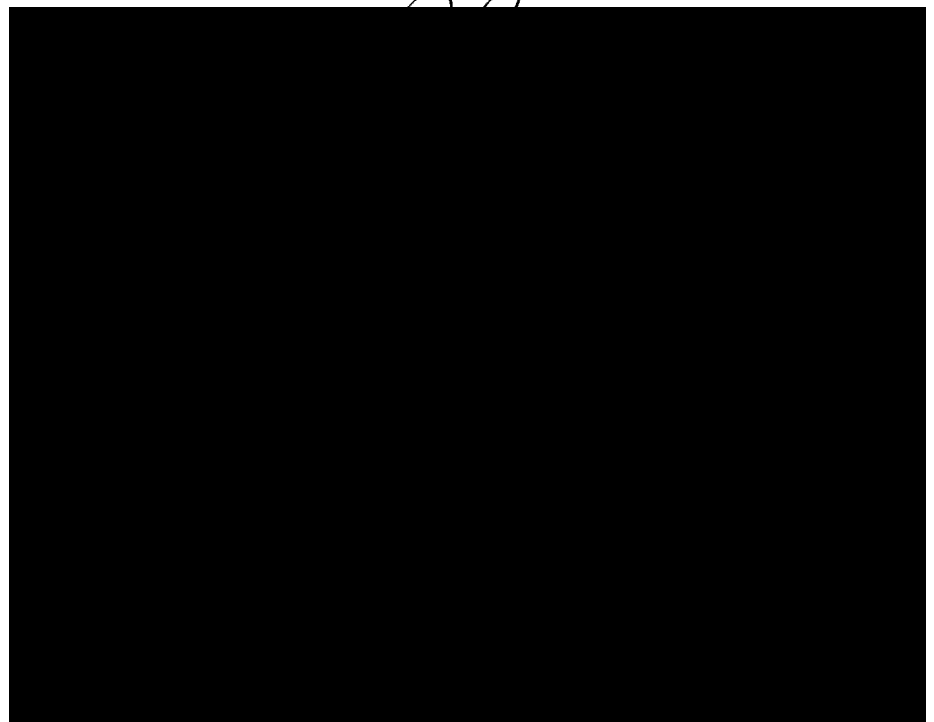MIDDLE-LEVEL LEADERS PERCEPTIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

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August 2008

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of middle-level principals personal and school accountability, their perceptions of beliefs and competencies that influence improvement in student achievement and accomplishment of accountability, and their perceptions regarding the adequacy of professional development and preparation for middle-level principals that affect their ability to improve student achievement and perform their leadership role in an increased accountability environment. This study specifically examined differences in the perceptions of middle-level principals' accountability based on socio-economics of the school, the number of years of administrative experience, and previous middle-level teaching experience.

The findings of this study indicated that middle-level leaders attending the National Middle School Association Annual Conference are supportive of being held personally accountable for student achievement in their schools and that they hold competencies and beliefs identified in research to have a positive impact on student achievement. The findings also indicated that middle-level leaders lack confidence in federal mandates currently used to create the desired student achievement improvements and they have some concerns with the effect accountability is having on themselves and their schools particularly in regards to unreasonable mandate expectations, lack of funding, over-testing, and the narrow focus of accountability mandates. In addition,

middle-level leaders indicated a need for more focused professional development in order to have a greater impact on the achievement of all students in their schools.

Results of the *Middle-Level Principal Accountability Questionnaire* found one significant finding. This was for the difference between principals with fewer than five years of administrative experience and those with more than five years of administrative experience.

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husband took charge of all household duties allowing me spend countless hours

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If our country fails in its responsibility to educate every child, we're likely to fail in many

other areas. But if we succeed in educating our youth, many other successes will follow

throughout our country and in the lives of our citizens.

George W. Bush

Educational institutions are complex microcosms of the society in which we live

(Heifetz, 1994). As pressure to compete on a global level increased in the United States,

the call for greater school accountability found a receptive national audience (Lashway,

1999). Across the U.S., school officials have been asked to furnish evidence that students

are attaining minimal standards, and a system of accountability for student achievement

is in place. Motivated by political, business, and public demands for higher standards and

greater measurable student achievement in schools, states have responded with various

accountability systems and methods of holding schools responsible for the academic

achievement of all students (Lashway, 2003). Although recent gains have been noted,

policy makers have been particularly concerned about the middle grades due to low

performance and decreased academic achievement on many state, national, and

international tests (Illinois State Board of Education, 2002; U.S. Department of

Education, 2001). Jackson and Davis (2000) assert "no single individual is more

important to initiating and sustaining improvement in middle grades students'

performance than the school principal" (p. 157).

This study examined the perceptions of middle-level principals regarding

accountability and determined if there was a statistically significant difference regarding

principal accountability perceptions based on the socio-economic status of the school, years of administrative experience, and prior experience at the middle level. This study explored the perceptions, competencies, and professional development needs of middle-level principals as they encounter local, state, and national accountability issues. By examining the perceptions of accountability of middle-level principals, this study was intended to inform state, district, and post-secondary principal preparation programs regarding the professional development needs of middle-level principals.

This section provides a brief introduction to some of the primary challenges facing middle-level principals striving to improve student achievement in the United States. The next section describes the background and overview of the study and the research methodology, including research questions, and the conceptual and methodological design. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study and a brief summary.

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

The American education reform movement has used the term "accountability" to describe a system, process, or model designed to improve the quality of education and hold students, educators, and schools responsible for academic performance (Elmore, 2002). Educational accountability has generated additional standardized testing and higher standards for students (Sack, 2000). Some educators assert that, for educators, it means a narrowing of curriculum; teaching for tests; a loss of curriculum exploration and programs; rewards for positive tests results; sanctions for poor test results; public scrutiny; and job security (Goertz, 2000; Lashway, 1999; Magee, 2000: Nichols, Glass, & Berliner, 2006). However, Littleton (2000) and Duffy (2001) observed that a flaw of

educational reform systems is a lack of clear definition of what accountability means. Duffy (2001) also noted that across 50 states, 50 variations of educational accountability have been proposed and implemented.

Educational accountability has also been defined as "schools and school systems being held accountable for their contributions to student learning" (Elmore, 2000, p. 4) Elmore observed that this definition carries an expectation that evidence is gathered from "evaluations of teaching and student performance to improve teaching and learning, and ultimately, to allocate rewards and sanctions" (p. 4). States who have achieved a modicum of success in defining systems of accountability provide clarification to teachers and principals for the achievement of student outcomes. Nonetheless, achievement of desired outcomes, and providing formal consequences when those outcomes are not met still present difficulties for these systems (Goertz, 2000).

As states developed and began to implement accountability systems in schools, Salazar (2001) observed that the success of accountability and school improvement efforts relied substantially on the leadership skills of the principal. Fullan (2003) emphasized that the role of the school principal was crucial to the success of obtaining positive educational accountability results in schools. As a result, new and increased responsibilities and additional pressure have been placed on principals to assure the success of accountability implementation and improved student outcomes (Lane, 2000). According to Abelman and Elmore, schools best prepared to respond are those with strong principals willing to nurture and develop a common vision (as cited in Lashway, 1999).

School administrators are facing new roles, communities are expecting more from schools, and the demands for increased student achievement challenge the usual practices of developing school leaders (Lashway, 2003). With accountability for results at the forefront of the nation's education agenda, much attention and pressure is focused on those serving in the capacity of school principal. The public outcry for greater accountability has put pressure on principals to provide evidence of raised levels of student performance and achievement. The duties of the 21st century school administrator have expanded beyond the daily management of "bonds, budgets, buses, and buildings" to one of "collaboration, communication, connection, child advocacy and community building" (Houston, 2001, p. 431).

Increased interest in educational accountability prompted various studies related to effective schools and effective leadership in schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Davis, 2001; Gibson, 2002; Goodlad, 1999; Mitchell-Lee, 2001; Petzko, 2005; Rouk, 2000, Schulte, 2000; Truitt, 2002, Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004). The attention given to school effectiveness has placed emphasis on principal leadership skills and behaviors associated with increasing student achievement. Several studies report that successful educational reform and school improvement depend on the vision and leadership of the principal (Gibson, 2002; Rickel, 2002; Salazar, 2001; Truitt, 2002).

Research has shown that principals' perceptions toward accountability and improving student achievement are positively associated with improvement in student achievement in schools (Epps, 2002; Herzberg, 1984; McCreary, 2002; Rickel, 2002; Truitt, 2002). Lane (2000) observed that principal perception of accountability for student achievement affects teacher performance and consequently, student achievement.

Furthermore, the principals' competencies, perceptions, and actions to improve student achievement have been positively correlated to student outcome gains (Anfara, Roney, Smarkola, DuCette, & Gross, 2006; Epps, 2002; Gibson, 2002; Herzberg, 1984). Research has also shown that teachers in high-performing schools positively associated their principals' leadership perceptions to high student achievement, while those in low-performing schools identified their principals' perceptions as a cause a low achievement (Knezek, 2001; Rickel, 2002; Truitt, 2002).

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the overall accountability systems for many states have had to be revised in order to implement definitive accountability measures for districts and schools (Sunderman et al., 2006). NCLB is based on the assumption that external accountability and the levying of sanctions will force schools to improve and motivate teachers to change their instructional practices, resulting in better school performance (The Education Trust, 2003). There are significant variances among states in regards to holding teachers and principals accountable for the education of students, especially regarding the use of rewards and sanctions based on student achievement (Gleason, 2000; NAESP, 1999; Sandham, 2001a). Primary obstacles in creating blueprints that will appropriately reward and sanction educators are accounting for a multitude of external variables to the school environment- such as student socio-economic status, access to education, and parent support which have a direct effect on student achievement, but are not controlled by educators (Cuban, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Kohn, 2000; Sacks, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The passing of No Child Left Behind and state educational accountability systems have placed middle-level principals in a critical role of ensuring that improvement in student achievement occurs. When evaluating the effectiveness of middle-level leadership, it is important to consider (1) principal perceptions of personal and school accountability for student achievement, (2) principal perceptions regarding improving student achievement, (3) principal confidence of competencies for accomplishing accountability mandates and (4) the adequacy of the professional development activities and preparation essential to accomplishing the mandates for improvement in the academic achievement of all children.

If a middle-level principal does not have a clear understanding of their personal accountability, are committed to improving student achievement, exude competence as a school leader, and are cognizant of the professional development needs related to performing in the present educational accountability environment, then, a trial-and-error approach to improvement occurs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of middle-level principals personal and school accountability, their perceptions and competencies that influence improvement in student achievement and accomplishment of accountability, and their perceptions regarding the adequacy of professional development and preparation for middle-level principals that affect their ability to improve student achievement and perform their leadership role in an increased accountability

environment. In addition, the study sought to learn if there were differences in the perceptions of middle-level principals based on personal and school demographics.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools?

2. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability?

3. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement?

4. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability that work in Title I-funded schools to those who work in non-Title I-funded schools?

5. Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of personal and educational accountability of middle-level principals with five or more years of administrative experience to those with fewer years of administrative experience?

6. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability with previous middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience?

7. What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding their university principal preparation programs and district preparation for accountability mandates.

8. Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability mandates?

Definitions of Key Terms

Accountability system, a state or district-definition of components used to form a system of accounting for the education of students within a state or district. An accountability system establishes statewide testing, means of measuring student achievement, common standards, and potential rewards and sanctions for student achievement of standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Adequacy, for the purpose of this study, is defined as the perceived quality of being able to meet state and national accountability objectives.

Competence is defined as the state or quality of being adequately prepared or well qualified. It also means having a specific range of skill, knowledge, or ability. In middle-level education it means possessing sufficient knowledge of middle school best practices (NMSA, 2003).

Educational accountability has been defined as "schools and school systems being held accountable for their contributions to student learning" (Elmore, 2000, p. 4).

Middle-level leader, for the purpose of this study, is synonymous with middle-level and middle school principal.

Middle School Concept is a collection of recommendations found in *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) that include: creating communities for learning, teaching a core of

common knowledge, ensuring success for all students, empowering teachers and administrators, preparing teachers for the middle-level experience.

Personal Accountability is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions; answering to a higher authority for one's actions or lack thereof (Anfara et al., 2006).

Socio-Economics, for the purpose of this study, is defined as the level of income of families attending a school, usually based on the number of students receiving free or reduced lunches. When the number of students receiving this service reaches a certain point, the state will declare the school as a Title I school, which qualifies the school for additional income from the state that is generally used to provide additional classroom support/assistance and technology.

Delimitations

1. The study was limited to middle-level principals who attend the 2006 National Middle School Association Annual Conference.

2. Special schools, charter schools, private schools, and alternative schools were not included in the study because of the various differences in setting, structure, and goals each institute seeks to achieve with students.

3. The study was limited to the information acquired from the literature review and survey instrument.

4. The results are limited in accuracy by the reported perceptions of the respondents completing the survey.

Assumptions

1. The respondents surveyed understood the scope of the study, the language of the instrument, and responded objectively and honestly.

2. The knowledge of survey respondents with regard to middle school best practices varied based on formalized training, preparation, and/or experience.

Significance of Study

Tirozzi, stated, "Our education system is not a masterpiece, though we have the collective skills to make it so; it is a continual work in progress, respecting the reality that children learn in different ways" (p. 434). The national spotlight is on educational accountability and the pressure is focused on those serving in the capacity of school principal. Lashway (1999) suggested that the role of the principal has changed in the last decade to include a greater focus on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability. Within a middle school environment, the competencies of the principal become even more critical due to the unique requirements of educating middle grades students. (Clark & Clark, 2002a) The middle school concept is an integrated approach that seeks to be supportive of the affective needs of young adolescents while providing for a rigorous academic program (Clark & Clark, 1994; Elmore, 2000; Lipitz, Mizell, Jackson, & Austin, 1997). Due to continued pressure for increased levels of student achievement, middle-level principals are challenged to find more effective ways to lead and to organize their schools for learning (Barth, 1990, 2002; Clark & Clark, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Over the past 30 years there has been numerous discussions and debate in educational literature regarding effective schools and accountability for measurable

student achievement. According to Clark and Clark (2006), the way accountability is interpreted and applied by school leaders determines how successful middle-level programs are supported.

Under the accountability structure of No Child Left Behind, states are required to test all students in grades 3-8 on a yearly basis. This testing, which was scheduled to begin in Spring 2006 (Education Commission of the States, 2002), places a significant burden on the schools. Especially middle-level schools.

America's middle schools have a problem. Like elementary and high schools, they must meet a barrage of new requirements as the result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). But NCLB treats middle schools like high schools some of the time, like elementary schools at other times, and lets individual states determine their status in some situations... mandates [are] anything but clear. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003, p. 3).

School administrators are conscious of the pressures of changing social, political and professional expectations. The challenge for school and district office administrators is meeting the social and professional demands created by increased professional accountability and expanded administrative responsibility--without losing sight of the need to meet the needs of children and protect their best interests. Leadership development must be incorporated in the overall process of educational governance in a school district. There are minimal examples of documented leadership development processes in school districts and even fewer examples regarding middle-level leadership. Normore (2004) concludes that there is a need for research that clearly conveys the links

between leadership development and more generalized school district leadership practices. According to Normore (p. 75),

> Leadership development cannot be treated as a lone concept in isolation, but rather as a component of organizational governance and procedural structures within a school district whereby clear expectations and limitations are set in terms of followers' perceptions, actions, attitudes and abilities."

In regards to accountability, there is a noticeable gap between the perceptions of academics and educational practitioners. When comparing accountability "conceptualizations" amongst several key education practitioners a broad range of interpretations and ideologies are evident. Individuals often associate accountability with performance appraisal, report cards, and site plans rather than some sort of "rationalized and integrated" school district process (Kogan, 1996; Leithwood, 1999; Leithwood and Earl, 2000; & Wagner, 1989). Current academic notions on accountability may not be filtering down to the perceptions of school administrators. Furthermore, it appears that much of what passes for accountability-oriented school reform is driven more by what might be considered ideal rather than empirical evidence. (Clark & Clark, 2002b; Normore, 2004).

Middle schools were selected for this study because the pressures of accountability inherent in NCLB and other state accountability mandates potentially have the greatest impact on middle-level leadership and practice due to mandatory testing of all student grades 3-8, which impacts all middle school grades (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003). Additionally, the focus on the academic performance of middle school students as measured by standardized test appears to contradict the middle-level concept,

"the focus on meeting the unique development needs of young adolescents who are undergoing tremendous cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes" (Valentine et al., 2004, p.1).

By identifying specific middle-level principal perceptions relative to educational accountability and areas where professional development should be focused, this study strives to make a contribution towards ongoing research in the area of the middle-level principalship. This study offers valuable feedback to middle-level principals and policy makers on principal perceptions, competencies, and professional development needed to improve student achievement in middle-level schools.

Summary

Historically, principal accountability involved a managerial approach to governing the day-to-day operation of the school. The emphasis has shifted from accountability for resource management to accountability for outcomes or student achievement (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001). School leaders must operate under a new definition of leadership that encompasses greater roles and responsibilities. Fullan (2003, p. 22), stated that,

> The principalship is the only role strategically placed to mediate the tensions of local and state forces in a way that gets problems solved. Thus, the solution is to acknowledge the extreme importance of the principalship, clarifying the power and nature of the principals' role, and invest in developing the capacity of principals' in numbers to act as chief operating officers.

Increased demands for accountability and school efficiency have placed new emphasis on school leadership perceptions, competencies, and professional development

associated with improving student achievement. As states develop and implement accountability in schools the success of school improvement efforts hinge on the leadership of the school principal.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an overview of literature related to educational

accountability in the United States. This chapter includes a description of literature that

attempts to define what "educational accountability" means and is followed by a

historical overview of educational accountability in the United States. Elements of

accountability systems have been included to provide background on the fundamentals

commonly found in most state accountability systems. This chapter also includes a

description of pressures associated with increased accountability and a synopsis of

middle-level education accountability. The chapter concludes with a review of literature

related to the school principals' role in regards to accountability.

Educational Accountability

Earl (1998) defines accountability as "a slippery concept that is both emotional

and judgmental – it means being responsible or obligated to report and to justify one's

actions to those who are entitled to the information (p. 186). According to Connellan

(2003), accountability can motivate (as well as intimidate) and create ownership of

organization goals. Connellan observed that mediocrity and a lack of accomplishment

within organizations could be directly linked to a lack of accountability by individuals.

The first step in achieving and accomplishing goals is to assign accountability to people,

"that's what you want people to be accountable for – reaching goals," noted Connellan

(p. 32).

Educational accountability cannot be achieved without clear goals and standards

(Ladd, 1996). According to Normore (2004), successful accountability systems are

enhanced if the purposes, intentions, roles and expectations are clearly defined and understood from the very beginning.

When it comes to student achievement in school, years of debate have created a lack of clarity and explicitness on what it means to be educationally accountable (Finn, Petrilli, & Vanourek, 1998a; Littleton, 2000). The result of limited consensus has produced various theories, programs, reformations, and systems in an effort to resolve declines in student achievement throughout public schools in the United States (Littleton, 2000; McNeil, 2000a; NASSP, 2002a). Some reforms have resulted in improved student achievement; others have created set-backs (Achieve Incorporated, 2001a; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Johnston, 2000; Pogrow, 1996; Rouk, 2000).

The assumption of responsibility and liability for actions appears lost in perpetual debates over educational standards and test scores. Littleton (2000) noted that a flaw in educational reform efforts in America is providing a clear definition of what accountability means. It has been suggested that educational accountability be defined broadly, holistically recognizing a complexity of issues, and be developed locally, in order to prevent it from simply becoming "scorekeeping" (Christensen, 2000). In a broad sense, educational accountability has been defined as a policy mechanism, which informs the public about the processes and progress accomplished by schools in their communities, districts and states. Levin (1974) also advised that understanding the various constituencies, differing goals from those constituencies, political context, and desired outcomes should be used in understanding and defining accountability as it relates to education. Umphrey (2000) also noted, "[Educational] accountability connotes

having the authority to make decisions that support student achievement and the responsibility for taking the blame when benchmarks are not met" (p. 4).

Accountability in education has become a hot topic of debate among citizens, educators, business leaders, and bureaucrats (Benveniste, 1985; Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), 2000; Mathews, 2001; Newbold, 2001; The Business Roundtable, 2001). Moreover, states continue to make progress in the development of accountability systems to improve achievement in schools. While there are many components of state systems that overlap, each state is unique in its own design of elements used to measure achievement and hold schools accountable for the academic performance of all students.

For many Americans, educational accountability has come to be defined as increased testing of students and calls for higher standards (Sack, 2000). For teachers and principals, it has come to mean a narrowing of curriculum, teaching for test preparation, a loss of teaching time and curriculum exploration, rewards for positive assessment results, sanctions for poor test results, public scrutiny, and job insecurity (Goertz, 2000; Lashway, 1999; Magee, 2000; McNeil, 2000b).

Motivation for educational accountability stems from studies that compared student achievement globally, nationally, within districts, and between schools (Bracey, 2005; Finn, 1997; Schmidt, 1999; The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Some studies also compare achievement differences between students of differing race, socio-economics, rural and urban educational settings, and other demographics (Barth, Haycock, Jackson, Mora, Ruiz, Robinson, & Wilkins, 1999; Cuban, 2001;

Darling-Hammond, 1994; McNeil, 2000b; NASSP, 2000; Schmidt, 1999). These studies have had significant impact on current education reform efforts.

Schmidt (1999), U.S. National Research Coordinator for The Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), noted that international education studies provided priceless perspectives on curriculum, teaching, and achievement between countries. The findings of TIMSS, Schmidt noted, have implications for researchers, teachers, and policy makers, and "challenge the assumptions" of education within countries (p. 1). Studies on global and national scales expose the strength of curriculum, rank student achievement, and list where academic emphasis is being placed and where more is required (Schmidt, 1999). Education policy and practice reform efforts have resulted in increased accountability measures throughout the United States (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Sowell, 1993; The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Public demand for school accountability led states to develop systems that hold schools more accountable for educating America's children. Various state governments and the U.S. Department of Education have implemented high-stakes achievement testing as the nearly singular approach to accountability (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2006). Finn, Petrilli, & Vanourek ask, "What happens when states erect tough, high-stakes accountability systems atop dubious standards? And what happens in states with great standards but no real accountability for attaining them?" (p. 2). Finn, Petrilli, and Vanourek (1998b) caution reformist that poorly designed reform systems and systems that do not have clear objectives produce only the mistaken idea of reform.

Despite strong public, business, and government support for accountability in education (Achieve Incorporated, 2001b; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Education Commission of the States, 2001; Gallup Organization, 2001; The Business Roundtable, 2001), challenges continue to hamper efforts to make meaningful differences in schools. Differences in philosophy and the colossal size of the task present significant challenges (Fullan, 1993). Fullan believed educational reform to be "complex and intractable" and that "Workable, powerful solutions are hard to conceive and even harder to put into practice" (p. 46). Fullan also noted, "Strategies that are used do not focus on things that will really make a difference, they [strategies] fail to address fundamental instructional reform and associated development of new collaborative cultures among educators" (p. 46).

Definitions of educational accountability differ throughout the United States; nonetheless, all definitions manage to focus on improvement in student achievement and ways to account for it. Trends in educational reform provide relevant insights that have brought us to our current state of educational accountability in the United States.

Educational Accountability in the United States

The United States Constitution does not formally address the issue of education. The Tenth Amendment makes explicit the idea that the federal government is limited only to the powers granted in the Constitution, so, by default the legal obligation for public education is transferred to the states. For the majority of the nation's history, states have had control over public education matters, as long as the basic rights of citizens were protected.

Educational accountability policy in the United States has evolved over the years to one that is prescriptive in nature in the form of comprehensive federal legislation like *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2002). Prior to 1965, educators and government policymakers wrestled with the issue of educational accountability (Macpherson, 1996; Ravitch, 2002). It was not until 1965 that a significant development occurred regarding the development of a national educational accountability directive; 1965 gave way to federal education evaluation standards for schools with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 1965). The ESEA provided federal dollars to school districts serving disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged students and "required the local district receiving funds to evaluate the effectiveness of its programs to insure that... federal money was accomplishing its intended purpose that it was actually leading to improvements within the system" (Taylor, 1974, 10).

President George W. Bush, enacted the No Child Left Behind Act, which became law on January 8, 2002. The Act reauthorized and considerably revised the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in a manner to provide all American public school children with the opportunity and means to achieve academic success (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The Act established school improvement criteria and federal government rewards and sanctions based on student improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). During June of 2002, a Gallup Poll found 57% of the public was in support of the NCLB, while 34% believed it was a "bad thing," and 9% were unsure (Gallup & Rose, 2002, p. 44). However, in September 2005, a Gallup Poll found that public confidence in American education had not increased since the law was enacted.

According to the more recent Gallup Poll only 4 out of 10 adults reported confidence in American educational institutions (Gallup Organization, 2005 p. 1).

Increased interest in educational accountability has prompted various studies related to effective schools and effective leadership in schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Davis, 2001; Gibson, 2002; Goodlad, 1999; Mitchell-Lee, 2001; Rouk, 2000; Schulte, 2000; Truitt, 2002). The attention given to school effectiveness has placed emphasis on principal leadership skills and behaviors associated with increasing student achievement. Although teachers directly affect student achievement via curriculum delivery, several studies report that successful educational reform and school improvement ultimately rely on the vision and leadership of the principal (Gibson, 2002; Rickel, 2002; Salazar, 2001; Truitt, 2002). The principals' competencies, perceptions, and actions to improve student achievement have been positively associated with student outcome gains (Epps, 2002; Gibson, 2002; Herzberg, 1984).

Historical Overview of Educational Accountability in the United States

The climate of education reform in the United States had been altered by public distrust of educational bureaucracies, an environment of political change, and growing international competition in the context of a global economy (Lee, 2000). In addition, Lee noted that the lack of focus and accountability in U.S. educational systems was a major deficiency when compared to the centralized school governance systems and "homogenous" educational values of other developed countries. In today's era of accountability, efforts to improve education are being made through standardized curriculum, high-stakes testing, and the allowance of school choice for unsatisfied consumers (Lee, 2000).

In the 1950s, through a variety of judicial and legislative actions the federal role in education increased significantly. Brown vs. Board of Topeka resolved racially segregated schools declaring them unequal because they violated the equal – protection guarantee (Education Commission of the States, 2001). Additionally, legislative actions and the influential writings of James B. Conant in 1953 provided rationale for universal elementary education, comprehensive secondary education, and a system for which the highly talented were selected for higher education (Linn, 2000). Tests were seen as weighty tools to support implementation of Conant's conception of the educational system.

By the 1960s, accountability measures for holding schools, principals, teachers, and even students were being used (Benveniste, 1985; Linn, 2000). During the 1960s, Michigan, Florida, and New York began to develop the first state accountability systems (Benveniste, 1985).

Another event in the accountability revolution was the publishing of the Coleman report, otherwise referred to as the Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS). The EEOS was in direct response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In an effort to assess the availability of "equal educational opportunities" afforded children of different ethnic communities, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned the study by James Coleman (Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Summary, 1). Based on research findings, Coleman and colleagues concluded the best predictors of student achievement are a child's background along with the socioeconomic makeup of the school the child attends (Coleman, 1966; Hoff, 1999; Macpherson, 1996; Ravitch, 2002).

The EEOS report focused the nation's attention on the home environment as opposed to the school environment being the most significant variable in predicting student achievement. As a direct result of the findings contained in the EEOS report, policymakers readjusted their focus from "resource inputs to outcomes accountability or performance evaluation of schools' (Macpherson, 1996, p. 86). Ravitch (2002) indicated that policymakers and educators are still at odds over the inputs and results dilemma.

In the mid-1960s considerable attention was focused on inequalities in educational opportunities and in student performance. Criterion-referenced testing (CRT) was also established (Baresic & Gilman, 2000). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the first major and most enduring effort to improve education (Lemann, 2000; Linn, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The ESEA was designed to support schools that primarily educated poor children (Duffy, 2001; Lemann, 2000). The ESEA Act mandated testing of students in grades three through eight.

Although the ESEA and the EEOS provided a blueprint for defining and reshaping the nations educational system the focus of the nation was elsewhere. The late 1970s was a hotbed of national controversy with the nation trying to recover from the effects of the Vietnam War and a looming energy crisis that threatened to cause even more national unrest. "The 1960s and early 1970s were decades of coping with the post-war demographics of the baby-boomers," explained Macpherson (1996, p. 84).

Ronald Edmonds, Director of the Center for Urban Studies at Harvard University, spearheaded a research study in response to the findings from the Coleman Report. The team's research initially began with two small case studies that contradicted Coleman's

hypothesis. In the case studies, children from two low-income schools "out performed their more affluent peers in nearby affluent schools" (Raham, 2001). Based on the results, Edmonds petitioned the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for funding to further research to identify similar schools. Edmonds and colleagues found hundreds of schools in which poor children were learning above and beyond achievement levels reported in the Coleman study. The educational institutions in Edmond's research were labeled "effective schools" and so launched the Effective Schools Movement.

Edmond's researchers compared like schools in similar neighborhoods where children were "either not learning or learning at a low level" (Association for Effective Schools, 1996). Ron Edmonds and his team examined the characteristics that made certain schools successful at educating low-income students. The findings of these researchers became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools (Association for Effective Schools, 1996; Lezotte, 2003; Raham, 2001). The Correlates of Effective Schools are:

- all children can learn and come to school motivated to do so;

- schools control enough of the variables to assure that virtually all students do learn;

- schools should be held accountable for measured student achievement;

- schools should disaggregate measured student achievement in order to be certain that students, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status are successfully learning the intended school curriculum; and

- the internal and external stakeholders of the individual school are the most qualified and capable people to plan and implement the changes necessary to fulfill the Learning for All Mission (Lezotte, 2003).

During the 1980s, the Effective Schools study provided data demonstrating that all students could learn, therefore, the national need for stronger educational accountability measures were reinforced. At the forefront of the stronger educational accountability call was a report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In 1981, Secretary of Education Terrell H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education in response to what he perceived as the public's growing discontent with the state of education. The commission was charged with examining all levels of teaching and learning in addition to "assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes... affected student achievement" (NCEE, 1983, Introduction, ¶4).

In April 1983, the NCEE released its findings in a landmark report titled *A Nation At Risk. A Nation At Risk* was a highly critical report of America's educational system and literacy rates. The report was like an atom bomb for those accountable for educating America's children, "The provocative language of the Commission's report...triggered a political furor" (Macpherson, 1996, p. 88). *A Nation At Risk* became the major catalyst for calls from policymakers advocating education reform during the 1980s. Members of the commission denounced the leaders of the nation's schools, colleges, and universities. The report stated, "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (NCEE, 1983, Introduction, ¶4). With the inflammatory report,

advocates of stronger accountability standards for the nation's schools gained tremendous

support in pushing legislation through in support of their cause (Goodlad, 2003;

Macpherson, 1996). Recommendations from the Commission included:

- strengthening of high school graduation requirements,

- adoption of rigorous standards for all educational institutions at all levels,

- devoting more time to learning the New Basics,

- improving the quality of teacher education programs, and that

- "citizenry" should hold educators and elected officials accountable for student

  achievement (NCEE, 1983).

Goodlad (2003) pointed out that because of the background of NCEE members,

the recommendations were relevant and workable and that the commission's findings

drew from a variety of material previously published. Because *A Nation At Risk* linked

what it defined as a weak educational accountability policy to the economic health of the

nation, recommendations stemming from the report unleashed an upsurge of legislation,

mandates, and regulations aimed at improving the quality of education while at the same

time holding schools accountable for what students learn (Macpherson, 1996).

Impacts of *A Nation At Risk* eventually infiltrated collegiate programs of study.

Colleges and universities across the nation were put on call to improve teacher education

programs. In response to the recommendations for improving teacher education

programs, the Carnegie Forum published a report in 1986 called *A Nation Prepared:*

Teachers for the 21st Century. The report advocated for the restructuring of schools to

reflect a more professional environment in which teachers could better promote student

achievement (Macpherson, 1996).

The Holmes Group, a consortium of research universities, published a study along with the Carnegie Forum Report called *Tomorrow's Teachers* that promoted the restructuring of the nation's teacher education programs. There were four major goals that the Holmes Group sought to address in their report: (a) modify the manner in which teachers are trained, (b) construct a realistic profession of teaching, (c) utilization of collaborative action research to transform schools, and (d) restructure college education programs to ensure objectives are met (Origins of the Holmes Partnerships, n.d., The Group Set Out To, ¶7).

In 1989, President George H.W. Bush invited the nation's 50 governors to an Education Summit to discuss the state of education in America. The general consensus among those present was "specific results-oriented goals were needed along with more direct accountabilities for outcome-related results" (Macpherson, 1996, p. 89). Following the Summit, the Nation's Governors, in cooperation with the White House and the Congress, adopted six National Education Goals to guide federal, state, and local authorities in devising plans for the overall improvement of the system" (U.S. Department of Education, 1995, Progress of Education in the U.S.A, ¶2). The six national educational goals cited were:

- school readiness for all children;

- increased high school graduation rate;

- students will demonstrate competencies in English, mathematics, history, sciences, and geography;

- U.S. students will lead the world in science and mathematics achievement;

- increased literacy among adults; and

- drug and violence-free schools (Major Issues and Trends, ¶2).

Macpherson (1996) wrote that policymakers and educators saw the six goals as "key remedial components of a comprehensive, universal and effective theory of educational systems, and by implication, redefined accountability priorities" (p. 89).

What started as America 2000 by the Bush Administration became known as The Goals 2000: Educate America Act during the Clinton Administration. Goals 2000 addressed the concerns brought out by the Education Summit of 1989 and two additional goals policymakers added prior to the law's passage Despite the positive response from many states, President Clinton met fierce political opposition to the proposal for testing as a means of gauging progress and thus received little support (Riley, 2002).

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act amended by Congress as the Improving America's School Act of 1994 added new dimension to accountability policy directives. The Improving America's School Act of 1994 (IASA) raised the accountability bar to a new level. What the IASA did, unlike other ESEA reauthorizations, was require states receiving Title I-funding to submit plans showing how they would create challenging content standards as well as challenging performance standards for all students. In addition to the school improvement plans, states were faced with another new requirement under Section 1111 of Title I regulatory statutes, Adequate Yearly Progress (IASA, 1994). Under section 1111 of Title I, each state's plan was required to include an explanation for what the federal government termed adequate yearly progress. Although the IASA established stronger accountability policies, there was no designated accountability measure and the law was not self-enforcing (Citizens'

Commission on Civil Rights, 2001; Jennings, 2003; Orfield & Debray, 1999; Piche, McClure, & Schmelz, 1999).

Hard Work for Good Schools, commissioned by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, highlighted the shortcomings of IASA. In the executive summary, Orfield and Debray (1999) wrote, "Although states report on the performance of groups, they are not held accountable for ensuring that these groups, or individual students, meet the same standards" (Key Findings, ¶1). Poor enforcement and monitoring on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education is believed to be part of the problem (Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights, 2001; Jennings, 2003; Piche et al., 1999).

Efforts to draft and implement a more prescriptive national educational accountability policy came full circle in 2001 with the seventh reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Policymakers were meticulous about eliminating the flaws that existed in previous amendments. The new authorization left established accountability guidelines for states, local education agencies, and schools who were receiving Title I-funds; but, as an added precaution, the reauthorized law amended as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 applied to all schools regardless of Title I status. The NCLB Act strengthens the accountability statues of all its predecessors (Citizen's Commission on Civil Rights, 2001; Jennings, 2003). The NCLB act brought sweeping regulatory change for all schools. What the NCLB Act does over its predecessor is:

- expands the information that must be provided to parents and reported to the public, including information about achievement gaps and teacher quality,

- strengthens the requirement that schools identified as needing improvement actually develop and implement plans to improve, and

- requires, for the first time in the history of federal education legislation, that every state define what constitutes a qualified teacher and ensure the schools education low-income and minority students do not employ disproportionate numbers of unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers (The Education Trust, 2003, p. 3).

Elements of Accountability Systems

Duffy (2001) noted that across the 50 states, there appeared to be 50 variations of educational accountability being proposed and implemented. Bernhardt (2001) observed that the life expectancy for school improvement efforts lasted around two years making it difficult to identify effective long-term reform strategies. Reeves (2004) observed that many schools worked diligently for approximately six months, and then gradually the effort to improve diminished. These failed efforts may have been the result of accountability systems being developed with little regard to a clear definition of accountability (Littleton, 2000). Overtime as accountability systems were put in place and states began showing improvement, Littleton (2000) found policymakers did improve the key elements of their systems.

Since the mid-1980s several approaches to measuring accountability in schools have surfaced. Kirst (1990) summarized these approaches as follows:

1. Accountability through performance rating. This approach includes such measures as statewide assessments, school and district report cards, and performance indicators. This accountability factor is particularly significant

because all other accountability measures rely on the process of making information easily accessible to the public.

2. Accountability through monitoring and compliance with standards or regulations. This approach requires auditing and budget reviews with set standards of performance which outline what should be learned and how.

3. Accountability through reliance on the market. This approach relies on competition to create accountability with options including open enrollment among the public schools. This approach introduced education alternatives such as charter schools and magnet schools, and allows vouchers and tuition tax credits for students who attend private schools.

4. Accountability through changing the locus of authority or control of schools. The assumption is that schools will be more accountable when the locus of authority has shifted. Parent-advisory councils, community-controlled schools, even state takeover or privatization are the suggested options.

5. Accountability through changing professional roles. This approach asserts that teacher should play an active role in peer review for dismissal or tenure. Another approach is for experienced or outstanding teachers to peer coach colleagues who are deemed ineffective. With this approach, site-based education policy allows teachers to play a significant part in the development of the policy. (pp. 7-10)

The elements found in the No Child Left Behind Act have been incorporated into many of today's state accountability systems. Lashway (1999) observed that essential elements in accountability systems include rigorous content standards; student progress

testing, publicly reported results, rewards and sanctions based on results, and targeted assistance. Additionally, research has found more recent accountability systems to include a larger focus on individual schools versus one-time fixes. Accountability systems are restructured to include more complex measurements that go beyond pass-fail marks, reporting of individual school characteristics which impact student learning and achievement, and methods of providing funding of all elements of the system (Fuhrman, 1999).

Critics continue to question elements of accountability systems, noting that standards are not consistent, are too narrow, focus on test scores, increase unethical placement practices, demoralize teachers in low-scoring schools; and limit curriculum to what can be easily measured (McCary, Peel, & McColskey, 1997). Although teachers are required to be highly-qualified under NCLB, there are no highly-qualified provisions directly aimed at principals. Furthermore, critics complain that the elements of educational accountability systems are set to satisfy and respond to the concerns of lawmakers (Maryland State Higher Education Commission, 2000). Fullan (1993) believed the direction already taken to create educational accountability is doomed to fail. Others researchers believe that unless the accountability movement pays closer attention to the design and development of accountability systems, the movement itself will struggle to succeed (Stevens, Estrada, & Parkes, 2000).

In the early 2000s, the elements of standards, assessments, rewards and sanctions, and professional development are consistently found as major components of state accountability systems.

Educational Accountability and the School Principal

The increased attention to student achievement in the United States has redesigned the role of the school principal by adding increased pressure to provide tangible evidence of student achievement. "Nowhere is the focus on the human element in public education more prevalent than in the renewed recognition for the importance of strong and effective school leadership," acknowledged Olson (2000, p. 16). The rush to high standards and holding schools accountable has created a new atmosphere for principals charged with making reform work. Expectations have also never been higher for principals to deal with changing roles in their leadership (Doud & Keller, 1998; Olson, 2000; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). The quality of the principal's leadership is viewed as a critical factor in determining the success of reform efforts that positively affect student achievement (Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

The American School Board Journal (1998), points out that educational accountability has made effective leadership in schools more challenging and complicated than it has been in the past. In addition to the demands of implementing school reform systems, increased emphasis on instructional leadership, special education, a sharp rise in safety issues, along with school management elements, have consumed the position. Additional factors of concern for principals are rewards and sanctions based on test scores, a lack of adequate preparation with aspects of reform implementation, and measurements perceived as unfair for determining leadership effectiveness (Datnow & Castellano, 2001; Hurley, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Pounder and Merrill also acknowledged that activities outside the school building present challenges for effective leadership in schools. They stated, "The environment in which the principal functions is

surrounded by an external world that is becoming less predictable, less orderly, and more cluttered for principals, creating a much more complicated managerial context within the school" (p. 36).

As principals' roles change, effective principals are expected to understand reform and deal positively with change. Delaware Governor, Thomas R. Carper, noted, "I've never been to a great school where they don't have a great principal. We haven't focused all that much in my state and my guess is in most of the states around here, on principal leadership" (cited in Olson, 2000, p. 16). As principals strive to lead in changing education environments, studies indicate that the principal's commitment to the system of reform being implemented is a critical factor for creating lasting change in student achievement (Cross & Rice, 2000). "It is the principal's passionate commitment to the students' academic achievement," Cross and Rice (2000) noted, "that will make the difference between a highly successful school and one that is content with the status quo" (p. 61). The principal's desire to be an academic leader and his/her ability to motivate staff and teachers was a common denominator of successful schools dealing with reform (Cross & Rice, 2000). Cross and Rice conclude that principals need to support good teaching, foster a climate that monitors the content to be learned, and recognize high student performance of rigorous standards.

There are a myriad of challenges associated with implementing educational accountability through school reform initiatives, Datnow and Castellano (2001) stated, "It is axiomatic that strong leadership is critical for successful whole-school reform" (p. 229). Keller (1998) found that principals of schools that most effectively accomplished accountability mandates and educational reform in their schools demanded

high-quality teaching, tracking of student achievement, and recruited good teachers. While these attributes were common in successful schools, Sergiovanni warns that "what makes a good principal in one setting doesn't in another" (cited in Keller, 1998, p. 26). Keller observed in a study of school principals that principals in effective schools possessed the following leadership characteristics,

- Recognized teaching and learning as the main business of a school;

- Communicated the school's mission clearly and consistently to staff members, parents, and students;

- Fostered standards for teaching and learning that are high and attainable;

- Provided clear goals and monitored the progress of students toward meeting them;

- Spent time in classrooms and listened to teachers;

- Promoted an atmosphere of trust and sharing;

- Built a good staff and made professional development a top concern; and,

- Did not tolerate bad teachers. (p. 25)

When principals are implementing reforms and strategies to improve student achievement, Epps (2002) noted effective change needed to be made gradually after observing the school in action and obtaining a feel for the climate. Epps' study supported research that principals with high expectations, who are highly visible, communicate openly, and share decisions, can improve student achievement.

In a study of Chicago public schools, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that in 100 of 450 schools who raised reading and math achievement scores the most, four components of social trust were found. The components were respect, competence,

confidence in others, and integrity. Bryk and Schneider noted that an important role of the principal is to foster social trust as an integral part of the culture that contributed to the collective action on behalf of students. The researchers emphasized those principals preparing schools for high-stakes testing need to have the skills to develop of school culture of trust that transcends all levels.

According to Fullan (2003), change in school culture is essential in creating improvement in student achievement. Fullan noted that improving schools is as much about rebuilding the culture of the schools as it is about change. Fullan perceived internal accountability as the primary determinant of how schools respond to external demands to perform, and that high internal accountability prepares schools to be successful in responding to external pressure for accountability and to meet performance expectations. Fullan further noted that having a strong theory of action around teaching and learning and a strong culture for promoting it is more important than the alignment between external and internal accountability (Fullan, 2003).

Other research studies on improving achievement acknowledged a relationship between principal leadership (including skills, behaviors, styles, and core values) and positive gains in student achievement (Ewing, 2001; Gibson, 2002; Rickel, 2002; Truitt, 2002). Studies conducted with teachers also associated the school principal with the improvement of student achievement and with teacher satisfaction (Gamble, 2001; McDonald, 2001). Teachers indicated that principals positively affect student achievement by their ability to develop positive relations (Mitchell-Lee, 2001), share leadership with teachers (McDonald, 2001), demonstrate strong commitment to student

achievement (Davis, 2001), and maintain a positive school climate for teachers and students (Epps, 2002).

As administrators become more involved in the quality of instruction going on within their schools, findings show that organization skills, leadership, and high teacher expectations of students are essential to making a difference in student achievement (Skrla, 2001). With the growth of the standards based environment, it has also become vital that principals thoroughly understand the instructional curriculum, master data interpretation, and become skilled at using data to improve student learning opportunities (Cross & Rice, 2000).

Wily and Louden (2000) observed that the principal's work is characterized by accountability, autonomy, and efficiency. When it comes to school accountability, principals are being held accountable as never before for the academic results of students. Keller (1998) noted, "Across the country, there's not a hotter seat in all of education than the one in the principal's office" (p. 25). While principals have had to be accountable in the past, Lashway (2000) observed state and federal policymakers had recently changed the rules for accountability by placing school leaders in new and uncomfortable territory. A 10-year study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) concluded,

> Today's principal faces more and more issues of increasing complexity and
> accountability, sometimes without the accompanying authority to balance the
> extent to which they are held responsible for what happens in their school. The
> multiplicity and diversity of issues confounds [principals'] ability to find time to
> do much more than respond to the current crises they face, leaving little time for

the type of reflective thinking and planning expected of most organizational leaders. (American School Board Journal, 1998, pp. 4-5)

As principals face new issues that accompany reform and accountability in schools, Murphy (1994) wrote that reform is often accompanied by role ambiguity or overload and by a loss of a sense of identity. During times of reform, principals spend increased time promoting the school's image and working more closely with parents, school boards, and other external agents (Murphy, 1994). When it comes to a principal's ability to create meaningful change in student performance, much of the challenge and stress associated with change is based on the condition of the school's current environment (MacIver & Balfanz, 2001). In a study of principals of large, high-poverty, middle schools, a researcher noted, "Virtually every principal I interviewed displayed signs of clinical depression. Why are these principals depressed? Because of the magnitude of the challenges they face helping their schools become high performing?" (MacIver & Balfanz, 2001, p. 36).

According to MacIver and Balfanz (2001), the level of leadership effectiveness and the role of the school administrator dealing with accountability vary considerably from school to school. The special challenges of school leaders needs to be understood by those evaluating and making important decisions regarding an administrator's career.

The Role of the School Principal

The principal's role has become more demanding in response to societal changes and school reform efforts. The ability to integrate a variety of role orientations has become a necessary element of a successful school leader (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Historically, principal accountability in schools primarily meant treating teachers fairly,

listening sensitively to parents, exercising instructional leadership, and staying within a budget (Lashway, 2000). The modern day principal has to be a curriculum expert, motivator, manager, staff developer, internal and external communicators, and skilled in the evaluation of standardized tests (Keesing, 2000; Lashway, 2000). Active, ongoing support of school reform has now become a critical role of the principal (Datnow & Castellano, 2001).

School reforms of the 1990s further identified the principal as a transformational leader whose role included being involved in school problem-finding and problem-solving, shared decision-making, decentralized leadership, and systemic change (Keller, 1998). With the renewed emphasis and demands of test accountability, the principal, as the school's instructional leader, has also come to play a pivotal role in student achievement. The principal's ability to motivate his or her staff when implementing an accountability system is fundamental to the success of the system (Keller, 1998; Lashway, 1999). Epps (2002) also found student achievement to be highly correlated to the principal's attitude and perceptions.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership requires the knowledge of classroom instruction and classroom involvement. Schools still need managerial leadership (Cranston, 2000); however, a major role change for principals working with school reform is an increased focus on teaching and learning (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Instructional leadership is seen as a critical function for successful school accountability and the credibility of the principal as leader (Datnow and Castellano, 2001). The challenge for principals, Datnow

and Castellano observed, is deciding how much principal involvement in a teachers' implementation at the classroom level is appropriate.

The National Staff Development Council reported that beyond the formal tasks of organizing, budgeting, managing, and dealing with disruption inside and outside the of the system, instructional leaders should,

> Be steeped in curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to supervise a continuous improvement process that measures progress in raising student performance. They must build learning communities within their schools and engage the broader school community in creating and achieving a compelling vision for their schools. (Cited in Hurley, 2001, p. 37)

As principals become more accountable for the teaching in their schools, MacIver and Balfanz (2001) recommended that principals pay close attention to curriculum and instruction and consistently make administrative decisions that support each teacher's ability to teach and every student's opportunity to learn. Curriculum mapping, providing teachers with essential materials, sufficient and consistent instructional time, and investing in quality professional development opportunities help to turn schools into more productive places of learning (MacIver & Balfanz, 2001).

Managerial and political expectations often limit the amount of time principals can give to instructional leadership (Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Since principals assume multiple roles with both managerial and instructional leadership elements, they make choices about where their time and attention is best spent (Pounder and Merrill, 2001). In order for principals to become effective instructional leaders, the majority of their time needs to be spent with teachers and students ensuring that standards are being reflected in

teaching and learning (Cross & Rice, 2000). However, Cross and Rice emphasis that it is unreasonable to believe a principal can be a content expert in all academic areas and should, therefore, trust competent faculty members to advise and guide them.

Principals are challenged to ensure that teachers implemented reforms at the classroom level (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Quite often teachers are not open to reform or comfortable being observed. Nevertheless, in schools experiencing success with instructional reform, Datnow & Castellano, noted that principals were visible in classrooms, knowledgeable and committed to the reform occurring in the school. In addition, principals encouraged teachers to focus on effective teaching practices not skill and drill, or solely on test-preparation (Mathews, 2001). An important aspect of being an instructional leader is being able to recognize good teaching and creating an atmosphere where teachers will be open to trying varied instructional methods (Mathews, 2001).

Principal-Teacher Relations. There are differences between schools and administrators in holding teachers accountable for their teaching and student performance (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001). Principals reported that in some cases, observations and follow-up visits with teachers served to divide the teachers and administration instead of bond (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Datnow and Castellano observed that the task of connecting teaching and administration is a formidable challenge to making reform efforts work and required changes in working relationships, as well as in instructional structures and cultures that hold them in place.

In order for accountability to have the desired outcomes on student achievement, the relationship between teacher and principal needs to extend beyond setting expectations and providing structure of an accountability system (Oakley & Krug, 1991).

There are "hard" issues in schools such as low standards, poor test results, dropout and other attendance related issues, etc., which need to be addressed by school leaders with their teaching staff. According to Oakley and Krug, the root causes of hard issues are referred to as the soft or human issues and are subjective in nature and are less easily measured. Oakley and Krug, assert that even if all systems, structures, and processes are in place for change, if the organizations fail to deal with human issues of attitude and the mindset of people who work the system, it will struggle to achieve desired results. In addition, Oakley and Krug, noted that performance is directly connected to the attitude of the people involved. As a principal guides teachers through change associated with accountability, attention to rejuvenate the spirit and energy of the teachers becomes an indispensable part of making accountability work in schools. Without addressing the "soft" issues, Oakley and Krug ascertain, student achievement will strain the relationship between teachers and principals.

Use of Assessments. Translating the results of data analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of student work is often complex (Cross & Rice, 2000). The ability to do so effectively becomes a powerful tool for instructional leaders in strengthening rigorous and focused learning opportunities for students and in becoming accountable for student education (Cross & Rice, 2000). A study by Guskey (2000) described leadership practices that encouraged teachers to use classroom assessments to improve their teaching. The practices included,

1. Emphasizing the use of classroom assessments as learning tools that are part of the instructional process rather than as evaluation devices used solely to document student achievement.

2. Regularly reviewing classroom assessments results with teachers to identify potential instructional problems. The sooner problems are identified; the sooner steps can be taken to remedy them.

3. Providing opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively examine their students' assessment results and work samples to identify areas of difficulty, and develop shared strategies for improvement.

4. Coordinating the assistance of central office and university personnel to help with improvement efforts. Developing working partnerships with outside experts to provide valuable information and access to resources that may not otherwise be available.

5. Reviewing assessment results and taking special note of improvements. Recognizing that success enhances morale and often stimulates motivation for further improvements. (p. 7)

In addition to assisting teachers with the use of assessment tools, new emphasis is being placed on administrators to use statistics and other forms of data to demonstrate progress and learning in their schools. As school administrators provide evidence of accountability within their schools, the use of and ability to present data will be a valuable tool (Schmoker, 1999).

Practicing Instructional Leadership. Instructional improvement, Supovitz (2000) stated, "is the mantra of school reform today" (p. 14). Cross and Rice (2000) acknowledged that as veteran and aspiring principals seek to become effective instructional leaders, they should begin with a vision of high student achievement. Implementing the vision, according to Cross and Rice, involves creating and maintaining

an inviting learning environment for students, demonstrating a commitment to the vision, and relentlessly working to prepare students to read and reason and discover the satisfaction of learning. The vision also needs to be effectively shared with parents, teachers, and students (Cross & Rice, 2000). Lashway (2000, pp. 10-11) added,

> First [principals] need to understand the kind of classroom environment that supports student achievement [instructional strategies, reflecting standards in the curriculum, student-teacher interaction that will enhance student motivation]. Second, they have to be able to create the organizational environment that allows teachers to create the right kind of classroom conditions [new strategies, needed resources, development of the belief that all students can learn].

Although principals may be held publicly accountable for students' achievement of standards, teachers remain the catalysts essential to any accountability program's success (Kaplan & Owings, 2001). Most teachers, according to Kaplan and Owings, while supporting high standards and accountability, feel ambivalent about high-stakes testing. When teachers lack confidence in the accountability program, they want a principal who can understand the new expectations and reassure them that they are using instructional practices that will help their students be successful on the important measures (Kaplan & Owings, 2001).

Distributed leadership practices can also help principals allocate time to focus on instructional leadership (Fullan, 1999; Normore, 2004; Supovitz, 2000). As principals look for ways to improve instruction, Supovitz observed the following practices help to create a distributed leadership environment:

- Principals are shepherds, rather than guardians, of reform. They seek opportunities to build the instructional capacities of their faculty, rather than maintain a tight hold on reform knowledge.

- Principals orchestrate leadership opportunities among the staff members in their schools. This will not only allow others to grow into leadership roles but will also relieve the stifling of timely effective decision making.

- Principals leave some decision making to others while they reinforce their focus on instruction.

- Principals recognize school leadership teams as natural places to practice distributed leadership. (p. 17)

Providing effective instructional leadership in schools begins with a vision of what an effective school looks like (Knezek, 2001). Creative sharing of this vision with all stakeholders involved in the school, grooming of classroom practices so that instructional skills encourage the vision, and the sharing of leadership responsibility to provide wider focus and ownership of the vision, will assist administrators in making the vision a reality (Cross & Rice, 2000).

Accountability Challenges and School Leadership

Principals face a world of decentralized school structures, increasing and changing environmental boundaries, less homogeneous schools, closer contact with stakeholders, and a market-driven view of education (Hurley, 2001; Normore, 2004). Normore (2004) acknowledged that the need for accountability is widely accepted, but the interpretation of what it means and how it functions are less clear. Hurley's (2001) observation of principals found they are being required to do more, be more, and be held

accountable for more. Principals have become environment negotiators, not merely school-system managers (Hausman, 2000), expected to lead communities through the change process and facilitate cultural change while responding to greater accountability demands (Crank, 2002; Cranston, 2000).

Lashway (2000) observed gaps in theory and practice that produce unresolved questions and unclear direction in school leadership. According to Lashway, the goals of educational accountability and the reform schemes used to reach these goals are often vague, assessments do not always align to standards, what gets tested is not always taught, real consequences are rare, and protests and boycotts are interfering with reform efforts. Principals also face pressure to improve schools, often without the necessary resources, staff support, or preparation to do so (Sandham, 2001a). The gaps, Lashway stated, "Leave the principal where they are often– squarely in the middle, trying to reconcile state and district mandates with the wishes and needs of local stakeholders" (p. 10).

Studies show that as principals strive to create high-performing schools, they are experiencing greater levels of stress, longer workdays, and higher public expectations (Sandham, 2001b). With current accountability measures, principals are under pressure to bring about change in short timelines, particularly increased student test scores (Keesing, 2000; Whitaker, 2003). Keesing noted, "Nobody knows how stressful it [the principalship] can be until you've sat in the chair" (p. A15).

Pressure from the district level to improve test scores can motivate principals to secure resources and push their staff to adopt accountability systems designed to reform schools (Datnow & Castellano, 2001). Datnow and Castellano found that the degree of a

principal's support for a program had an important influence on gaining his/her staff's support for the program. Once the program was in operation, Datnow and Castellano observed that principals had to become more flexible, "loosen the reigns a bit … listen a little bit more and sometimes lose a battle [to teacher]" (p. 232). In order to make a system succeed, some principals encourage complaining teachers and those who did not support the reform program to leave the school (Datnow & Castellano, 2001).

Concerned with maintaining their employment, principals do not feel they have the license to question the external accountability system when they disagree with the issues and the ambiguity they face (Printy & Marks, 2001). As a result, principals focus more on administrative and leadership practices within accountability mandates (Printy & Marks, 2001). Eisner (2001) suggested principals need not shy away from such mandates and should exercise leadership by confronting accountability issues, especially when they feel inadequate criteria are being used to determine how well their schools are doing (Eisner, 2001).

Leadership Characteristics for Educational Accountability

The doctrine of accountability creates images of no-nonsense, take charge leaders that are ready at a moments notice to get the job done (Lashway, 2000). Such principals are characterized as "committed, innovative, and entrepreneurial," even "heroic" and "charismatic" (Lashway, 2000, p. 10). Principals whose reputations and jobs are on the line may be tempted to lead an aggressive, straight-ahead charge to the desired goals. This kind of directive leadership can be satisfying to the principal and reassuring to the community in the short run; however, Lashway (2000, p. 10) cautioned,

Directive leadership, no matter how skillfully done, eventually runs into one immutable reality: students, not principals or teachers, must do the learning. Unlike factories, where the foreman can still get out on the floor and operate a machine, schools can accomplish their work only in the minds of students. Teachers and administrators can offer advice and encouragement, but each student must struggle to develop the desired knowledge, skills, and habits of mind.

Directive leadership also conflicts with the recent trend toward site-based management and shared decision making (Lashway, 2000; Mathews & Crow, 2003). Although bottom-up leadership, according to Lashway (2000), has not completely proved itself, relatively few teachers or parents would be willing to give up the voice they have acquired in recent years – especially when they also face high-stakes accountability (Lashway, 2000). Fullan (1999) suggested a combination of well-conceived top-down prescriptions, coupled with bottom-up interactive collaboration, as an effective combination for principal leadership.

Having the competencies to handle and implement accountability demands is essential to providing effective leadership in the accountability environment. A principal's leadership style and agenda also keep a school moving forward and distribute authority and accountability (Lashway, 2000). Lashway's research of leadership and accountability suggests the following competencies and strategies for principals dealing with accountability:

- Be multidimensional, able to shift tactics from directive to facilitative and back again.

- Overcome compartmentalization. Work towards school-wide, collective goals in reading or writing.

- Insist that teachers become proactive in addressing student learning problems.

- Attempt to overcome the isolation of teaching, by shaping the normative culture of the school through recruitment of teachers and through direct involvement in the life of the school.

- Push for a unifying mission and vision. Have parents and teachers actively engage in the decision-making process, and teachers working effectively in teams. Share ownership of the vision, and accountability, with the rest of the school community, and encourage teachers to take initiative and be innovative.

- Act as the conscience of the school, clearly stating – and living up to – core values.

- Analyze test results carefully. Use results to lead to improvement on the next round of testing.

- Develop organizational capacity – pointing the school in the right direction. Understand that student achievement reflects on the entire organizational environment. Articulate and sustain a collective vision of excellence, commitment to student learning and cultural norms that demand continual improvement, provide access to knowledge, promote improvement, and provide resources (time, money, and people) that support improvement.

- Build a data-driven organization that is capable of analyzing assessment results objectively and using the information to change teaching practices.

- Negotiate a common definition of accountability with realistic expectations. Define accountability outside the realms of test scores; there are other indicators (i.e., dropout rates, attendance, disciplinary records). Recognize the seriousness of test scores without blowing them out of proportion.

- Ensure a timely flow of meaningful information about the school's accountability efforts.

- Negotiate with the district for necessary resources and authority to carry out the school's accountability mandate. Inform local and state governing bodies of the unique challenges surrounding improving achievement in your school.

To accomplish accountability for student achievement in schools, MacIver and Balfanz (2001) found that principals first needed to develop a conviction that their students are capable of learning and achieving at high levels. Secondly, principals must build consensus around a shared vision of what a high-performing school is and does.

Mathers (2001) and Schmoker (1999) further advised, after a vision is created, leaders should set realistic goals and let teachers decide how to meet them, finding ways to help those teachers who do not measure up. This process was similar to the one which the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina used to develop a system that provides schools a set of targets for student achievement. The targets are based on how the children performed in the past, with a reasonable increase expected for the future. The systems effectiveness depends on the entire school staff working together. If the school does not meet or exceed its targets, no one gets rewarded. Team planning was an added benefit to the schools (NAESP, 1999).

Interviews conducted with principals that have been able to close achievement gaps in high-poverty and high-minority schools found the schools shared similar characteristics (NASSP, 2002b). The characteristics were,

- Extensive use of state and local standards to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers.

- Increased instruction time for reading and mathematics.

- Substantial investment in professional development for teachers focused on instructional practices to help students meet academic standards.

- Comprehensive systems to monitor individual student performance and to provide help to struggling students before they fall behind.

- Parental involvement in efforts to get students to meet standards.

- State or district accountability systems with real consequences for adults in the school. (p. 1)

Reform and accountability in schools have required changes in the way schools are led. Datnow and Castellano (2001) found that once a reform program was in place, "it shaped principals' roles, and the principals' leadership styles in turn shaped the implementation of the reform" (p. 242). The Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 1996) developed a set of six standards for school administrators, with a focus on knowledge, dispositions and performances. According to the ISLLC, a school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by:

- facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community;

- advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;

- ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;

- collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;

- acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

- understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (ISLLC, 1996; Fullan, 1999).

Principals craft school cultures that help set the foundation for change (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Principals also need to create and maintain a sense of trust in the school, use positive "micropolitics", and create a professional community and networks for communication (Murphy & Louis, 1999). Defining the current role of the school principal, one administrator stated, "My role is to make it [school] comfortable, enjoyable, a learning environment for my students to learn and my teachers to teach. [I] monitor to see whether or not my children are making progress" (cited in Datnow & Castellano, 2001, p. 233).

Accountability and Middle-level Education

Historically, schools serving students in the middle grades have struggled with how to best educate students who are in their early adolescents. The academic performance of middle grades students tends to decline from their elementary school performance (Killion & Hirsch, 1998).

"Courageous, collaborative leadership is considered one of the essential characteristics of a successful middle school" (NMSA, 2003, p. 10). Middle-level leaders are tasked with understanding the unique needs of middle grade learners while possessing a keen knowledge of the theory and best practices of middle-level education. A primary responsibility of middle-level leaders is to educate colleagues, parents, policymakers, and community members about middle school philosophy and proven practices in order to build support for long-term, continuous school improvement. Several comprehensive research studies have reported that young adolescents who attend middle schools that use essential programs and practices have higher achievement scores (Lee & Smith, 1993; Mertens, Flowers, & Mulhall, 1998), "as the prime determiner of the school culture, the principal influences student achievement and teacher effectiveness by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining an effective instructional program" (NMSA, 2003, p. 10).

As the standards movement continues to put pressure on school administrators, middle-level educators are expressing concerns that this increased pressure for student improvement may have a negative effect on many of the developmentally responsive programs and practices in place (Clark & Clark, 2003). In a recent survey conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals' *National Study of Leadership in Middle Level Schools*, 82% of the principals expressed concern about the impact that mandated standards will have on middle-level programs (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002). However, Clark and Clark (2003, p. 56) contend, "mandated standards do not pose a threat to developmentally responsive middle-level programs. It is how the standards are interpreted and the procedures that are put in place to achieve them that determines their appropriateness in educating young adolescents."

Middle or junior high schools have been the focus of numerous educational reforms to address the unique educational needs of young adolescents. Three significant educational reform initiatives are currently influencing middle school structure and practice: (a) the Turning Points middle school concept that emerged in the late 1980s from the Carnegie Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents, (b) small learning communities, and (c) professional learning communities (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2005). *Turning Points* called for change "from departmentalized, impersonalized content driven classrooms to child-centered, interdisciplinary leaning communities, rich with opportunities for students to learn collectively and experimentally through deep engagement in thematic, problem-based curricula" (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000, p. 53). The Turning Points Comprehensive Middle School Reform Model (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Jackson & Davis, 2000) was particularly aimed at schools serving at-risk populations in hopes of dramatically changing middle schools' structure, roles, and relationships. *Turning Points* revitalized the middle school movement during the 1990s (Oakes et al., 2000).

Clark and Clark (2006), assert that middle-level leaders need to know to whom they are accountable to and understand the various forms of accountability. According to Clark and Clark, middle-level leaders must be:

- Personally and professionally accountable – middle-level leaders hold themselves accountable for their own learning and that of the students and adults in their schools.

- Ethically accountable – middle-level leaders are committed to doing the right thing.

- Politically accountable – middle-level leaders recognize and address the expectations of stakeholders. (Clark & Clark, 2006, p. 52)

Successful middle-level leaders recognize the importance of learning and they hold themselves accountable for expanding their personal knowledge and are aware that their intellectual development is pivotal to their own success, the success of their teachers, and the success of the students in their schools (Clark & Clark, 2002b). Middle-level leaders use various techniques to acquire knowledge bases that give them a better understanding of young adolescents, developmentally responsive middle-level programs, and effective leadership practices (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004).

Recent research indicates a lack of formal principal and teacher preparation in middle-level education (Anfara et al., 2006; McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, 1996; Scales, 1992; Scales & McEwin, 1994; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004). Jackson and Davis (2000) report that 25% of middle school teachers have specific preparation to teach at the middle-level, yet, 71% of middle-level principals have taken two or fewer courses specific to middle-level education (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002). Most importantly, successful middle-level leaders hold themselves accountable for guaranteeing that their staff is knowledgeable about best practices, the middle school concept, curriculum structures, and appropriate instructional practices (Clark & Clark, 2006).

In addition to being personal and professionally accountable, successful middle-level leaders are ethically accountable. Being ethically accountable means that middle school leaders have knowledge about developmentally appropriate programs for young adolescents, and knowledge about the ways in which students learn and adults teach

(Clark & Clark, 2006). Furthermore, Clark and Clark note, "ethical accountability also requires that accountability be anchored in the school's culture of values and perceptions, cultures that value young adolescents, trusting relationships, learning, assessment, collaborative decision making, and shared leadership." (p. 54)

Additionally, ethical accountability has a strong human element. Building strong trusting relationships, understanding personal and professional needs, and celebrating individual and group successes are leadership responsibilities that lead to higher student achievement. Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2003, p. 4) identify the following principal leadership responsibilities that focus on human interactions:

1. Culture – focuses on shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.

2. Visibility – has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students.

3. Contingent rewards – recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments.

4. Input – involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.

5. Affirmation – recognizes and celebrates school accomplishments and acknowledges failures.

6. Relationships – demonstrates an awareness of personal aspects of teachers and staff.

Principals of the six highly successful middle schools visited by the NASSP Study Team (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004) provided good examples of ethical accountability. The team concluded that principals who are ethically accountable:

- Collaboratively develop a strong core of shared values and beliefs that includes emphasis on success for every child, high expectations for all children, and education of the whole child.

- Build strong relationships of trust and friendship.

- Have high expectations for themselves and the teachers in their schools.

- Share their knowledge of middle-level education with teachers, parents, and community members. By organizing communities of learning they establish processes where stakeholders become knowledgeable about young adolescents and developmentally appropriate programs.

- Encourage collaboration and shared decision making and provide the necessary time for teachers to meet and confer.

- Organize their schools and fully implement programs in ways that are congruent with research and best practice and that satisfy the variety of requirements for accountability.

- Expect that curriculum and instruction be aligned with mandated standards and school expectations and taught in ways that ensure student success.

- Collaboratively establish appropriate assessment procedures that are congruent with school values, beliefs, and curricular and instructional goals and provide frequent and systematic feedback on progress toward their accomplishment. (Clark & Clark, 2006, pp. 55-56)

Middle-level educators are concerned with the emphasis parents, community members, and business and political leaders place on standardized or criterion-referenced test (Clark & Clark, 2006). However, leaders of highly successful middle schools do not

limit their accountability to state and district standards and high-stakes testing. Successful middle school leaders work collaboratively with all stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, and community members) to establish the scope of accountability and how accountability will be demonstrated (Clark & Clark, 2004; Schools to Watch, 2004). Reeves (2004) characterized this broad-based, holistic data-driven approach as accountability for learning and Stiggins and Chappuis (2005) as assessment for learning. These holistic approaches allow principals and teachers to identify what they will be accountable for and specific strategies they will use to assess accountability (Clark & Clark, 2006).

One critical responsibility of middle school principals is to recognize and use federally mandated programs such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) to increase support for programs and professional development within their schools (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004). Clark and Clark (2006) noted that principals in successful middle schools exercise political accountability by,

- Recognizing and supporting required standards and measurement procedures;

- Recognizing that accountability for learning is far more comprehensive than the narrowly focused standards as measured by the state and school district;

- Recognizing that accountability for learning involves many stakeholders— students, teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and policymakers—who need to be provided opportunities to learn about young adolescent development and developmentally responsive education; and

- Recognizing and using all available resources (federal, state, local, public, and private) to increase the learning opportunities for students and adults in their schools. (pp. 56-57)

Successful middle-level leaders are personally, professionally, ethically, and politically accountable. They hold themselves accountable for being informed about best practices for middle-level learners as well as recognizing the importance of meeting state and local mandates for accountability without limiting their responsibilities to narrowly defined accountability measures. By developing a healthy relationship with all stakeholders and understanding the complexities of accountability, they successfully lead their schools through the ambiguous climate of national reform (Clark & Clark, 2006).

Principal Preparation for Accountability

Mathers (2001) questioned whether or not educational accountability has tried to do too much too soon without proper preparation and support for everyone involved. Richard F. Elmore, Harvard School of Education professor, noted that as a result of schools and districts moving full-speed ahead and placing demands for change on the shoulders of educators, principals do not know how to accomplish what they are expected to do (cited in Mathers, 2001).

Principals across the nation are being tasked with turning around low-performing schools and creating better-performing schools (Reid, 2000). Reid (2000) further asserts that effecting change requires not only systemic change, but also administrators who understand how to create such change. Even when principals are supportive of reform, their ability and competency to provide effective leadership may be hampered by their own experience, preparation, and/or perceptions, or by the lack of understanding of the

reform itself (Murphy, 1994). According to Meyer (1994), if school leaders do not comprehend what is expected of them in their role and function as administrators, how can they be held accountable?

The lack of preparation for accountability may also be a reason that administrators, while seeking to be professionally accountable, avoid public inspection and explanation of their actions (Rallis & MacMullen, 2000). Rallis and MacMullen contend there are limited structures in place for administrators to facilitate collective analysis and decision making. Therefore, principals shield the community from the actual teaching and learning that takes place in schools, and avoid risks that may actually lead to improved learning.

As the nation's emphasis on setting high standards for students intensifies, Reid (2000) recommends that principal development should not be overlooked. Among the in-service needed to help facilitate administrator success in this new era of accountability, Reid noted that principals especially needed preparation focused on instruction. In addition to continual, hands-on preparation in the classroom for principals, those who serve in high-poverty schools require preparation focused on such conditions (Reid, 2000).

When more than 1,400 principals in the NASSP National Study of Middle Level Education (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002) were compared to the 98 principals in NASSP's National study of Highly Successful Schools (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004), it revealed the following data:

1. Principals of highly successful schools were more knowledgeable about middle-level practices. More than 50% had three or more courses specific to middle-level education.

2. Principals of highly successful schools were more likely than principals in the national sample schools to rate interdisciplinary teaming, exploratory courses, teacher advisory programs, cocurricular programs, and intramural activities as being very important. They were also more likely to fully implement these programs than were principals in the national sample.

Many states have recognized the need to better prepare their administrators for effective leadership for school reform and the accountability of student achievement. For example, in an attempt to assure the quality of leadership in schools, South Carolina assesses the instructional leadership and management of first-time principals before they receive a permanent appointment as a principal (NASSP, 2002c). The state also established the Principal Induction Program in which first time principals participate during their first year in the principalship and an Assistant Principal Academy to better prepare assistant principals for leadership (NASSP, 2002c).

Popham (2000) found there is a need to provide principals with an intense and comprehensive assessment – literacy in service to assist them in understanding what high-stakes tests reveal about instructional quality and student understanding. In addition to a personal understanding of how to interpret test scores, principals must be prepared to explain those scores to teachers and parents (Popham, 2000). Popham further stated, "Today, a staff of educators without fluency in assessment represents a clear liability for any educational leader and school system" (p. 14). Parents should ask teachers and

principals what use they make of achievement test analysis (Chalmers, 1999), and administrators should be able to tell them (Harrington-Lucker, 2000).

Functioning Under Accountability Pressure

The 21st century principal requires a unique talent for leadership: that it be constructivist, transformational, facilitative, instructional, developmental, distributed, or moral (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). According to the *2003 Occupational Outlook Handbook* published by the U.S. Department of Labor (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2003, Education Administrators, Job Outlook, ¶4), "A sharp increase in responsibilities in recent years has made the job more stressful, and has discouraged teachers from taking positions in administration." The National Center for Education Statistics was able to capture evidence of the shift in the decision to remain a principal in a 1993-94 survey. According to the 1993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey, only 23% of principals responding to the survey indicated a desire to remain a principal until retirement, whereas 33% in 1990 wanted to work until retirement (Fiore & Curtin, 1997). The survey reported a 10% increase, over a 4-year period, among principals wanting to retire from the profession.

Educational accountability has increased pressure on school principals for effective stewardship in schools (Delgado, 2001). The concept of accountability and its implications are quite complex from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint (Wagner, 1989). Accountability refers to "the relationship between an individual who dispenses service and the recipients of that service" (Seyfarth, 1999, p. 103). Accountability by definition, Lashway (2000) noted, is about a school's obligation to society. Communities, parents, policymakers, newspapers, businesses, and average citizens – hold a stake in

school results and have a right to ask questions and understand what is happening in their schools. With school report cards now commonplace and consequences riding on outcomes, schools are under a constant microscope. The principal, Lashway commented, is the point person in responding to community concerns and at the same time proactively tells the school's story (Lashway, 2000).

In a survey of U.S. superintendents (conducted by the National School Board Association [NSBA]), more than one-third believed it is very important to hold administrators accountable for student achievement. As principals deal with the different aspects of school accountability, superintendents have urged school administrators to stay focused on the bigger picture of what accountability will do for student growth and improvement (American School Board Journal, 1998).

State accountability rules have increasingly pressured school administrators to prove their worth and demonstrate that students are learning in their schools, often at levels that exceed previous expectation (Hoff, 2000). Several states have passed legislation which included scores on standardized tests as part of an administrator's evaluation for effectiveness (Harrington-Lucker, 2000). The results have also directly affected principal careers (Hoff, 2000). Public ranking of schools based on test scores has also caused "especially keen" pressure on school principals (Harrington-Lucker, 2000, p. 33). It is natural, Harrington-Lucker stated, "that none of the principals want to be the lowest ranked or part of the lower group of schools within a ranking" (p. 33).

According to Hoff (2000), the accountability environment for a school principal is "pressure-packed" (p. 15) with demands for greater productivity and increased accountability for student achievement. Rallis and MacMullen (2000) further noted,

The term accountability frequently makes teachers and principals uncomfortable because they see the questions asked and the data collected as originating outside their work. Accountability appears to be public and external rather than a central component of their own practice; they see themselves as 'held' accountable, not as 'being' accountable. (p. 72)

Summary

The history of educational accountability in the United States can be traced largely to public distrust, politically changing environments, and international competition. Once considered a world leader in technology and education, educational and political leaders felt the United States lost focus in education and the accountability necessary to keep student achievement at high levels. Unequal educational opportunities and poor scores on international tests motivated the federal government to become more involved in promoting higher standards and accountability in public education.

Although education is largely a state function, the federal government has intervened in order to increase educational accountability within the nation's public schools. Interventions include the passing of federal acts that provide compensation for states that must show academic improvement and sanctions for those that do not. The annual testing of students has become one of the requirements in order to receive federal funds. Despite continuing debate on the use of standardized testing as a primary means of determining student achievement, today all 50 states have some form of statewide testing of students. Furthermore, by focusing exclusively on test scores, standardized testing may in fact run contrary to the ideals at the core of the middle school movement: which imply

that schools at the middle level should meet the intellectual, social, and physical needs of all students.

The school principal has emerged as the central figure in the success of accountability systems responsible for moving schools in the direction of improved student outcomes. The classroom teacher's role in the delivery of curriculum to students, successful educational reform and school improvement ultimately rely on the vision and leadership of the principal (Gibson, 2002; Rickel, 2002; Salazar, 2001; Truitt, 2002). The principals' competencies, perceptions, and actions to improve student achievement have been linked positively to student outcomes (Epps, 2002; Gibson, 2002; Herzberg, 1984).

Hurley (2001) observed that a principal who was a good building manager used to be considered effective. The role, while still demanding good managerial skills, has now grown to be much more multidimensional (Matthews & Crow, 2003). In the 21st century principals need competencies in shared decision-making, communication and interpersonal skills, effective teaching, curriculum, special education, instructional leadership, and implementation and diagnoses of standards, tests, and accountability systems (Hurley, 2001). The presence and pressure of state and federal accountability legislation have created an urgency to understand the competencies, skills, and perceptions necessary in order for school leaders to provide the leadership students and schools need to succeed in the 21st century.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of five focuses. The first was learning how middle level leaders perceive personal accountability for student achievement. The second was to learn how principals perceive general school accountability mandates being used to improve students' achievement. The third was to understand principal perceptions toward their competencies needed for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates, the fourth was to comprehend principal perceptions related to improving student achievement. The fifth was to identify the adequacy of preparations that principals have received for their function in the accountability environment from school districts, and post-secondary preparation programs.

The methodology applied in this study was correlational and descriptive. The objectives was to learn if relationships between responses and the variables studied existed, as well as provide a description of the current sentiments of middle-level leaders (Gay & Airasian).

Design

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods, which are two major types of scientific research (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002) to examine the research questions:

1. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools? (RQ1)

2. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability? (RQ2)

3. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement? (RQ3)

4. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability that work in Title I-funded schools to those who work in non-Title I-funded schools? (RQ4)

5. Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of personal and educational accountability of middle-level principals with five or more years of administrative experience to those with fewer years of administrative experience? (RQ5)

6. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability with previous middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience? (RQ6)

7. What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding the adequacy of their post-secondary university principal preparation programs and district preparation for accountability mandates. (RQ 7)

8. Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability mandates? (RQ8)

The quantitative portion of this study (RQ1-RQ7) consisted of a survey that utilized a comparison-group design. The qualitative portion of the study (RQ8) used the most common design for educational studies which is the basic descriptive design

(Merriam, 1998). By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research designs, the researcher was able to address middle-level leaders concerns regarding No Child Left Behind and other accountability issues as well gain a perspective of specific professional development needed for middle-level leaders as indicated by the survey instrument.

Statistical procedures used to address the research questions were univariate descriptive statistics for qualitative variables for research questions 1-3 and 7, descriptive methodology for research question 8, and a linear regression with single independent variables for research questions 4-6.

Survey Instrument

The review of literature did not uncover a middle-level leader principal accountability survey instrument of similar interest to this study. A new instrument was constructed for this study, *The Middle-Level Leader Principals' Perceptions of Accountability Questionnaire* (Appendix A).

The Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part I of the survey instrument solicits demographic information and includes questions about principal status (public or nonpublic), gender, age, educational background, years of administrative experience, school size and status (urban, suburban, or rural), grade levels served, school size and years at current location, Title I, middle-level education college coursework, previous middle-level teaching experience, highest degree earned, and National Middle School Annual Conference attendance. In addition to the descriptive data, information obtained through the survey responses was used to determine if there were statistically significant differences in principal perceptions for principals who worked in Title I-funded schools compared to principals who worked in

non- Title I-funded schools, perceptions of principals who had fewer that five years of administrative experience compared to principals who had more than five years of administrative experience, and perceptions of principals who had previous middle-level teaching experience compared to those who did not have previous middle-level teaching experience.

The researcher created survey statements based on the review of literature, discussions with professionals in the field of education and the researcher's direct experience as a middle-level educator. From this review, 37 statements were created and placed on a scaled response format on the survey instrument. The scaled format was used to turn nominal data into quantified data. Each scale is 1 to 7, where a response of 1 indicated strong disagreement with the statement and 7 indicated strong agreement to the statement. Additionally, the survey provided two open-ended questions for participants to comment regarding concerns they have about No Child Left Behind and/or other accountability issues and specific professional development needed for middle-level leaders.

Specific statements on the survey were designed to assess the following research questions:

1.   What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools? (RQ1) Statements 7-27

2.   What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability? (RQ2) Statements 1-6

3.   What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for

successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability

mandates for improved student achievement? (RQ3)

Statements 28-35

4.   What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding their university

principal preparation programs and district preparation for

accountability mandates. (RQ7)

Statements 36 and 37

Correlation methods were used to examine the following research questions. The

researcher was able to obtain participant demographics from Part I of the survey

instrument. The demographic information included questions regarding Title I status,

years of administrative experience, and prior middle-level teaching experience. Linear

regression models determined if there were any statistically significant differences for the

following research questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals'

   perceptions of personal and educational accountability that work in Title I-

   funded schools to those who work in non-Title I-funded schools? (RQ4)

2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of

   personal and educational accountability of middle-level principals with five or

   more years of administrative experience to those that have fewer than five

   years of administrative experience? (RQ5)

3. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals'

   perceptions of personal and educational accountability that have previous

middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience? (RQ6)

Basic descriptive methodology of qualitative research was used to address the following research question:

1. Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability mandates? (RQ8)

Statements 38 and 39

The following topics were issues in public education across the United States in 2006. These topics served as a base for the statements on the survey instrument.

1. Principal accountability for student achievement

2. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation

3. High-stake competency testing

4. Teacher accountability

5. Principal rewards and sanctions

6. School demographic influence on student achievement

7. Improving student achievement

8. Principal competencies for the accountability environment

9. Effects of accountability on principals and schools

10. Professional development needs of principals in regard to accountability

Validity

In order to establish validity, a panel of seven experts in the field of education was asked to review the survey instrument. The panel consisted of the Mississippi Department

of Education executive to the superintendent for educational accountability, a former

North Carolina state superintendent and current member of the National Assessment

Governing Board, two university faculty members and researchers, two former middle

school principals, one high school assistant principal, and one middle school guidance

counselor. The panel reviewed the survey instrument and provided feedback on the

following questions:

1. Does the survey contain language that can be understood by middle school

   principals?

2. Does the survey address specific accountability issues that relate to the

   research questions?

3. Are any statements obtrusive, offensive, or biased?

4. Are there any statements that should be excluded from the survey?

5. Are there other statements that should be included that are not a part of the

   survey?

The review panel made recommendations on instrument aesthetics, question

format, demographic information, and content. These recommendations were used to

modify the initial survey instrument to improve clarity and content.

The researcher established internal validity of the instrument by having statements

pertaining to each domain. Table 1 lists each domain along with the accompanying

statements.

Table 1

Study Domain

Domain	Statements
1. Principal perceptions toward personal accountability	7-27
2. Principal perceptions of educational accountability	1-6
3. Principal perceptions of competencies for accountability	28-35
4. Principal perceptions of professional development related to accountability	36, 37

To avoid a response set some items were stated in the negative and reverse coded in the analysis. These items include statements 3, 4, 6, 11, 18, 22, 24, 25, 36, and 37.

Although the reliability of *The Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* was calculated after the researcher collected the data for the study, it is being reported in this section. The data she obtained was used to determine Cronbach's alpha to report reliability. The Cronbach's alpha was slightly lower than the critical cut-off limit of .70. Cronbach's alpha was .65 for the 21 statements pertaining to principal perceptions of accountability. An instrument is considered to be reliable if it has a reliability coefficient of at least .70 (Wallen & Frankel, 2000), therefore *The Middle-Level Principal Perceptions of Accountability Questionnaire*, does not meet this accepted standard.

Participants

This study was limited to middle-level leaders attending the 2006 National Middle School Association Annual Conference. In order to have the best representation possible for comparisons and analysis of variables, the study included middle-level

leaders of public schools. Participants represented middle-level leaders from across the United States and Canada. Responses from principals of special schools, charter schools, private schools, and alternative schools were not included in the study because of the various differences in setting, structure, and goals each institute seeks to achieve with students. Identification of school type was requested on Part I of the survey instrument.

Procedures

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix B). It was the intention of the researcher to survey attendees at the 2006 National Middle School Association Conference at the Principal Leadership Brunch. The researcher sought permission by contacting the conference organizer via email (Appendix C). However, no reply was received.

Data collection procedures

Middle-level leader conference attendees had limited access to participating in this study due to the lack of formal venue available to the researcher. However, to provide the greatest opportunity for participation, the researcher identified and attended conference sessions geared toward middle level leaders as identified by the conference bulletin. The researcher was granted permission by several conference presenters to administer the survey instrument at the beginning and end of their leadership sessions. At the start of the conference session an announcement was made to attendees informing them of the voluntary opportunity to participate in the researcher's study. Additionally, a request was made during the session breaks and at the conclusion of individual sessions providing attendees additional opportunities to participate in the researcher's study.

The researcher was unable to attend all conference sessions to provide an opportunity for all middle-level leaders to participate in the study. Participants not attending the conference sessions attended by the researcher were allowed an opportunity to participate in the study during any convenient opening they had in their conference schedule which included lunch breaks, breakout sessions, and time available at the conclusion of the conference day.

The *Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* included a cover letter (Appendix D) that described the purpose of the study, informed consent of the participant, and confidentiality of the research subject. The *Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* asked participants to identify whether they were a public or non-public school administrator, their gender, age, years of administrative experience, years as a middle-level principal, city/state of their school, school classification, school size, Title I status, highest level of education, college coursework in middle-level education, and prior middle-level teaching experience.

Information obtained from the responses to the *Middle-Level Leaders Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* was used to identify principal perceptions of accountability, competencies, and adequacy of professional development. Additionally, the research determined if statistically significant differences existed between selected variables studied regarding accountability. This study discusses current sentiments of middle-level leaders in regards to NCLB and other accountability issues. Moreover, principal comments on the research instrument identified perceived professional development needs for middle-level leaders.

There was no attempt to correlate responses to individuals providing feedback on the survey instrument. On average, the *Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* took 15 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using *SPSS 16.0*. Data generated from the *Middle-Level Principal Perceptions of Accountability Questionnaire* is primarily ordinal in nature (Gay & Airasian, 2000). A linear regression was employed to determine if differences exist within the independent variables studied. General statistical data analysis provides a description of principal perceptions. Principal's comments made on the survey instrument were consistent with themes that emerged from review of literature. Comments similar in nature are categorized in the results of Chapter IV and discussed in more detail in the conclusions found in Chapter V.

Reporting of Data

The results of the study are reported in Chapter IV by research question. Each question contains a summary of findings to answer the question and a discussion of any statement and composite results used to arrive at the conclusions. The discussion includes the results of the analysis of the composite(s) used to answer the question, and any supportive and/or informative statistics found in the participant responses to individual statements within the composite(s). Variances found between principal responses and the variables of the study are summarized with each research question with significant differences reported. Chapter V includes a summary of the findings, implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the analyses implemented to address the objectives of this study. This includes assessing the following research questions:

1. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools? (RQ1)

2. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability? (RQ2)

3. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement? (RQ3)

4. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability that work in Title I-funded schools to those who work in non-Title I-funded schools? (RQ4)

5. Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of personal and educational accountability of middle-level principals with five or more years of administrative experience to those with fewer years of administrative experience? (RQ5)

6. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability with previous middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience? (RQ6)

7. What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding their university principal preparation programs and district preparation for accountability mandates. (RQ7)

8. Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability mandates? (RQ8)

Three statistical procedures were implemented to address the research questions. These include descriptive statistics for Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 7, a linear regression with single independent variables for research questions 4-6. The variables included for the linear regression were: school eligibility for Title I-funding, principal experience, and previous teaching experience in middle-level schools. The dependent variable is the principals' perceptions of accountability which was measured by statements 7-27 on the survey instrument. Lastly, qualitative research methods were used to answer Research Question 8. Principal's comments made on the survey instrument were categorized by themes emerging from the review of literature to provide descriptive statistics. The emerging themes for concerns regarding No Child Left Behind were: funding, inconsistency, narrow focus, sanctions, and subgroup concerns. The emerging themes for professional development needs were: data analysis, differentiation, understanding middle school learners, instructional strategies, collaboration, and leadership training.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents the descriptive statistics for the general population of the study. This includes frequency distributions and percentages of participant's gender, grade level, school type, title and highest degree

of education. The other set of descriptive statistics presents the mean and standard deviations for age, number of years of administration experience, number of years as middle school principal, number of years at current position, number of students, number of years of middle school teaching and the number of years attending the National Middle School Associations Annual Conference.

The second section presents the descriptive statistics used to address Research Questions 1, 2, 3 and 7. These include the mean and standard deviations for each one of the statements on the survey instrument in order to determine which ones contributed more to the principals' perception of accountability as well as the principals' perceptions of educational accountability and principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement.

The third section presents the results for Research Questions 4-6. This section includes a reliability consistency analysis in order to determine whether the statements on the survey instrument adequately address the construct of principals' perceptions of accountability. The fourth section presents a content analysis for Research Question 8.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the participant's gender, grade level, school type, title and highest degree of education. The sample consisted of 91 participants, over half of them were male ($n = 48$), while the rest were female ($n = 43$). In the sample population 41.8% of the principals worked in a suburban setting, 31.9% worked in an urban setting, and 26.4% worked in a rural school setting. The most frequently reported highest level of education was the Master's Degree (71.4%) and the

least frequently reported level of education was the Doctorate (9.9%). The majority of

principals sampled did not work in Title I-funded schools (54.9%). Of principals that did

work in schools receiving Title I-funds (45.1%), 62.5 % received full Title I-funding.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	48	52.7
	Female	43	47.3
School Type	Urban	29	31.9
	Suburban	38	41.8
	Rural	24	26.4
Title I Funding	Yes	41	45.1
	Fully Funded	25	___
	No	50	54.9
Highest Degree	Master's	65	71.4
	Education Specialist's	17	18.7
	Doctorate	9	9.9

Table 3 presents the remaining descriptive statistics for principal demographics.

The average age of the principal was 46.17 years (SD = 9.16). The maximum age of the

principal was 64; the minimum age was 28 illustrating a wide range of ages between the

principals in the study. The average number of years of administration experience was

10.58 years (SD = 7.98), with the average number of years as a middle level principal

4.92 years (SD = 4.58). On average, principals had spent 3.73 years (SD = 3.51) at their current position. There was a large variance in school size. The average student enrollment was 737.29 (SD = 363.87). The number of students in the school ranged from 50 to 2,000 students. The average number of years the principal spent teaching at a middle school was 7.36 (SD = 6.49). The average number of years principals were in attendance at the National Middle School Associations Annual Conference 2.86 (SD = 3.40).

Table 3

Summary Statistics for Additional Demographic Characteristics

	n	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	90	28	64	46.17	9.16
Years of Administration Experience	90	1	35	10.58	7.98
Number of Years as Middle School Principal	90	1	20	4.92	4.58
Number of Years at Current Position	91	1	17	3.73	3.51
Number of Students	91	50	2000	737.29	363.87
Number of Years of Middle School Teaching	74	0	25	7.36	6.49
Number of Years Attending Conference	91	1	22	2.86	3.40

In Table 3 the number of years teaching at a middle school for the principal had 17 missing observations. Similarly, the age, number of years of administration experience and number of years as a middle school principal were each missing one observation.

With the exception of the number of years of administration experience, these variables were not required in further statistical analyses.

<center>Descriptive Statistics: Personal Accountability</center>

Research Question 1: What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools? In Table 4 descriptive statistics for principal perceptions of accountability are presented (statements 7-27).

Table 4

Summary Statistics for Perceptions of Personal Accountability

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
13.	My leadership reflects ethical values.	6.56	.60
19.	It is important for students to meet high educational standards.	6.55	.64
10.	I encourage faculty members at my school to generate creative solutions to problems.	6.26	.89
8.	I have a vision and a plan for improving academic achievement in my school.	6.22	.85
7.	I make a difference in student achievement in my school.	6.13	.81
15.	I am concerned about the academic achievement of minority students in my school.	5.96	1.41
16.	My school community is focused on improving the academic achievement of all students.	5.93	1.13
9.	I have effectively communicated my expectations for improvement to teachers, students, parents, and the community.	5.70	1.15
12.	I develop teacher-leaders	5.64	1.17
17.	My teachers and I consistently use data-driven decision making to make plans for improvements in student achievement.	5.58	1.30

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
18.*	As a result of NCLB, funding for educational programs aimed at student achievement in my school have not increased.	4.99	1.83
20.	I am concerned about the reputation of my school because of the publication of test results.	4.72	1.98
24.*	I believe my school leadership abilities should not be judged by my students' state mandated test scores.	4.49	1.50
26.	If I were the principal of a school that performed at or above average on state mandated tests, I would feel better about the effectiveness of my leadership.	4.37	1.71
23.	Student achievement is influenced more by factors beyond my control than by factors within my control.	4.18	1.59
21.	My workload has become unmanageable because of NCLB.	4.09	1.50
22.*	Because of the recent emphasis on school accountability, I spend less time on instructional leadership.	3.93	1.73
25.*	Due to the recent emphasis on school accountability, I enjoy being a principal less.	3.76	1.89
27.	I am more concerned about student academic achievement now than I was prior to NCLB legislation.	3.73	2.00
11.*	Due to other professional responsibilities, I do not have time to provide individual coaching, mentoring, and professional growth opportunities to faculty members.	3.41	1.75
14.	Increased accountability and raised standards positively impact a school administrator's attitude about leadership.	2.26	1.61
	Personal Accountability Composite	5.03	.48

Note. * Asterisks indicate statements that were reverse coded

In Table 4, the highest rated statement was "My leadership reflects ethical values" with an average value of 6.56 (SD = .60). This was closely followed by the statement "It is important for students to meet high educational standards" which had an average score

of 6.55 (SD = .64) and the statement "I encourage faculty members at my school to generate creative solutions to problems" with an average score of 6.26 (SD = .89).

Higher scores were observed more frequently than smaller scores. Higher scores meant higher agreement with the statement about personal accountability and lower scores indicated a lower level of agreement with the statement. Standard deviations for each of the aforementioned statements were less than one, which provides evidence that the variability or deviation of the scores about the mean was relatively small. Other statements that were observed to have higher scores were "I encourage faculty members at my school to generate creative solutions to problems" 6.26 (SD = .89), "I have a vision and a plan for improving academic achievement in my school" 6.22 (SD = .85), and "I make a difference in student achievement in my school" 6.07 (SD = 1.03).

Descriptive Statistics: Educational Accountability

Research Question 2: What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability? Descriptive statistics for educational accountability as identified by statements 1-6 on the survey instrument were examined. These results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary Statistics for Perceptions of Educational Accountability

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
1.	Principals should be held accountable for student achievement in their schools.	5.85	1.07
5.	Teachers should be held accountable for student achievement in their classrooms.	5.75	1.19
6.*	I believe that provisions of NCLB do not provide a means for improving the education of all students.	5.09	1.67

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
3.*	Expectations for Title I principals are not more demanding as those for non-Title I principals.	5.02	1.73
4.*	Student achievement based on state mandated test scores is not a good tool for evaluating principal effectiveness.	4.74	1.63
2.	If principals were personally sanctioned or rewarded based on student performance on state mandated tests, student achievement in schools would improve.	3.53	1.79
	Educational Accountability Composite	5.09	.79

Note. * Asterisks indicate statements that were reverse coded

In Table 5, the highest rated statement was "Principals should be held accountable for student achievement in their schools" 5.85 (SD = 1.07). This was closely followed by the statement "Teachers should be held accountable for student achievement in their classrooms" 5.75 (SD = 1.19) and "I believe that provisions of NCLB provide a means for improving the education of all students" 5.09 (SD = 1.67). "If principals were personally sanctioned or rewarded based on student performance on state mandated tests, student achievement in schools would improve," was the lowest rated statement 3.53 (SD = 1.79).

Descriptive Statistics: Competencies

Research Question 3: What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement? Descriptive statistics regarding principal competences as derived from statements 28-35 on the survey instrument are examined and presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Summary Statistics for Perceptions of Competencies for Successful Implementation and

Accomplishment of Accountability Mandates for Improved Student Achievement

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
35.	I am competent in my ability to build a school culture that supports and sustains improved student academic achievement.	6.02	.83
32.	I am competent in my ability to implement middle level education programs.	5.93	1.08
31.	I am competent in establishing school-wide goals and expectations that will improve student achievement in my school.	5.91	.94
28.	I am competent in my instructional leadership skills to improve student academic achievement in my school.	5.90	.98
34.	I am competent in my ability to modify programs where change is needed to improve academic achievement.	5.84	.96
33.	I am competent in my public relations skills for reporting test results to parents and the media.	5.65	1.20
29.	I am competent in my understanding of different types of assessments and what they measure.	5.60	1.18
30.	I am competent in my ability to interpret, analyze, and use data to improve student achievement in my school.	5.56	1.27
	Competencies Composite	5.80	.86

In Table 6 the perceptions of principal competencies for successful

implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student

achievement indicate a high level of agreement with each item. The average scores

ranged from 5.56 (SD = 1.27) for the statement "I am competent in my ability to

interpret, analyze, and use data to improve student achievement in my school" to 6.02

(SD = .83) for the statement "I am competent in my ability to build a school culture that

supports and sustains improved student academic achievement".

Descriptive Statistics: Preparation

Research Question 7: What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding

their university principal preparation programs and district preparation for accountability

mandates? These results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Summary Statistics for Adequacy of University Programs and District Preparation

(n = 91)

Item No.	Statement	Mean	SD
36.*	My university preparation program did not adequately prepare me for current school accountability mandates.	4.93	1.97
37.*	My school district has not taken adequate steps to prepare me for current school accountability mandates.	3.25	1.69
	Preparation Composite	4.09	1.49

Note. Asterisks indicate statements that were reverse coded

In Table 7, "My university principal preparation program did not adequately

prepare me for current school accountability mandates 4.93 (SD= 1.97), had a higher

agreement rate than "My school district has not taken adequate steps to prepare me for

current school accountability mandates," 3.25 (SD = 1.69), indicating that principals

perceived their school districts as taken more adequate steps in preparing them for

accountability mandates.

Data Analysis Research Questions 4 to 6

In order to address Research Questions 4-6, a linear regression model was employed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference in perceptions of accountability as measured by statements 7-27 on the survey instrument by certain characteristics. Specifically, was there a difference between perceptions of principals that worked at schools eligible for Title I-funding and those work at schools that do not receive Title I-funds; principals with five or more years of administrative experience and those with fewer years of administrative experience; and between principals with previous middle-level teaching experience and those who do not have previous middle-level teaching experience.

The perceptions of accountability were operationalized as a continuous variable to conduct the regression analysis. A reliability consistency analysis was conducted to determine whether the statements on the survey instrument adequately addressed the construct of principals' perceptions of accountability. The results of the reliability analysis are presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Results for Reliability Analysis for the Principals' Perceptions of Accountability

Construct	Alpha	No. Items
Accountability	.65	21

The overall reliability analysis resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .65 which was slightly lower than the critical cut-off limit of .70. The statements combined do not meet the reliability requirement for measuring the perceptions of accountability. To account for

this inadequate reliability statistic an item analysis was conducted on each one of the statements that comprise the perceptions of accountability.

Research Question 4: Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability that are eligible for Title I funding to those who do not receive Title I funding?

For this research question the independent variable was whether the principal worked in a school eligible for Title I-funding while the dependent variable was the perceptions of accountability. Results of the linear regression $F(1.89) = .327, p = .57, R^2 = .00$ did not support RQ4. The parameter estimates (B) for this regression analysis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Parameter Estimates for Regression Analysis Between Perceptions of Accountability and Eligibility for Title I-funding (n = 90)

Variable	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	42.46	1.06	40.15	
Funding - Yes	2.66	1.56	1.71	.09

As indicated from the results presented in Table 9 there was not a statistically significant difference between principals that work in schools that receive Title I-funding and those that work in schools that do not receive Title I-funding ($t(87) = 1.71, p > .05$). Although principals that worked in schools that receive Title I funding scored 2.66 units higher on the perception of accountability score than those that did not work in Title I-

funded schools, this difference was not statistically significant at the .05 level of significance.

Research Question 5: Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of personal and educational accountability of middle-level principals with five or more years of administrative experience to those with fewer years of administrative experience?

The independent variable was whether the principal had five or more years of administrative experience while the dependent variable was the principal's perception of accountability. The independent variable was operationalized as an indicator variable where a value of 1 was assigned to the principal with five or more years of administrative experience while a value of 0 was assigned to the principal with fewer than five years of administrative experience. RQ5 was supported by the linear regression analysis $F(1.88) = 4.79, p = .03, R^2 = .05$. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Parameter Estimates for Regression Analysis Between Perceptions of Accountability and Years of Administrative Experience (n = 90)

Variable	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	44.79	.88	51.00	
Less than 5 Years	-4.47	1.77	-2.53	.01

For the comparison between those with fewer than five years of administrative experience 4.86 (SD = .50) and those with five years or more administrative experience 5.10 (SD = .47), there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of

principals (t(87) = -4.47, p < .05). On average, principals with fewer than five years of administrative experience scored 4.47 units lower on their perceptions of accountability when compared to principals with five or more years of administrative experience.

Research Question 6: Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of personal and educational accountability with previous middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience?

The independent variable for Research Question 6 was related to whether the principal had previous middle-level teaching experience while the dependent variable was the perceptions of accountability. RQ6 was not supported F(1.89) = .00, p = .96, R^2 = .00. The parameter estimates (B) for this regression analysis are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Parameter Estimates for Regression Analysis Between Perceptions of Accountability and Previous Middle-level Teaching Experience (n = 90)

Variable	B	SE	t	p
Intercept	43.77	1.80	24.23	
Teaching Experience - Yes	-.10	2.01	-.05	.96

As indicated by the results presented in Table 11 there was not a statistically significant difference between principals with previous middle-level teaching experience and those that did not have previous middle level teaching experience (t(87) = -.05, p > .05). The overall fit of the model (R^2) was found to be equal to .00. The independent variable did not explain any of the variation in the dependent variable of perceptions of accountability.

Qualitative Results

Research Question 8: Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left

Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability

mandates?

Statements 38 and 39 on the *Middle-Level Principal Perceptions of*

Accountability Questionnaire provided principals the opportunity to express concerns

regarding No Child Left Behind and other accountability in schools and suggest specific

professional development needed for middle-level leaders. There were a total of 91

participants in the sample population. Participants made a total of 109 comments. Forty-

two percent of responses concerned increased accountability dictated by No Child Left

Behind, and 58% regarded specific professional development necessary for middle-level

leaders. In Table 12 categorical summaries of principals' perceptions of concerns with

accountability mandates are presented and Table 13 presents categorical summaries of

principals' perceptions regarding professional development needs to meet accountability

mandates. A complete listing of responses is found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

Table 12

Principal Perceptions of Concerns Regarding Accountability Mandates

Category	Frequency
Funding	10
Subgroup Concerns (Sp. Ed, ELL)	10
Miscellaneous*	10
Narrow Focus	9

Category	Frequency
Sanctions	4
Inconsistency	3

Note. Asterisk indicates responses that do not fit established categories

In Table 12, the most frequently occurring categories of concern were funding and subgroup (22 %), and the least occurring was inconsistency (7%). Ten responses fell into the miscellaneous because they do not fit into the construct of the other established categories.

Table 13

Principal Perceptions of Professional Development Needs

Category	Frequency
Data Analysis	12
Leadership Training	11
Instructional Strategies	10
Collaboration	9
Miscellaneous*	9
Understanding Middle School Learners	7
Differentiation	5

Note. Asterisk indicates responses that do not fit established categories

Data analysis (19%) was the most recurring frequency in Table 13, followed by leadership training (17%). Understanding Middle School Learners (11%) and differentiation (8%) were the categories with the fewest responses.

Summary

The statistical analysis using the regression models resulted in one significant finding. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups of principals ($t(87) = -4.47$, $p < .05$) with fewer than five years of administrative experience and those with more than five years of administrative experience. Principals with five years or more administrative experience have a significantly higher average perception of accountability for the students than principals with fewer than five years of administrative experience. The researcher did not find a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of accountability scores between the principals that work in Title I-funded schools and those that do not work in Title I-funded schools, or between principals with previous middle-level teaching experience and those that do not have previous middle-level teaching experience.

Responses of principals on the *Middle-Level Principal Perception of Accountability Questionnaire* indicated that principals had concerns with current accountability mandates. Participants also noted perceived areas of professional development needs.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In the 21st century, school principals must arise like a phoenix from the burning flames—wiser, stronger, and ready to take on greater challenges. According to Master Lam Kam Chuen (1996, p. 24), "the phoenix flies far ahead to the front, always scanning the landscape and distant space. It represents our capacity for vision, for collecting sensory information about our environment and the events unfolding within it."

The role of the school principal is vital to the success of accountability in schools and to the improved achievement of all students (Fullan, 2003). Ensuring improvement occurs has fallen heavily on the shoulders of the school principal. Failure to improve achievement has resulted in principals being fired, relocated to other positions, and in some instances, having their schools closed, taken over, and reorganized by the state.

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceptions of middle-level principals personal and school accountability, their perceptions and competencies that influence improvement in student achievement and accomplishment of accountability, and their perceptions regarding the adequacy of professional development and preparation for middle-level principals that affect their ability to improve student achievement and perform their leadership role in an increased accountability environment. This study specifically examined differences in the perceptions of middle-level principals' accountability based on socio-economics of the school, the number of years of administrative experience, and previous middle-level teaching experience. The eight research questions addressing the research problem were:

1. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of personal accountability for student achievement in their schools?

2. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of educational accountability?

3. What are middle-level principals' perceptions of their competencies for successful implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student achievement?

4. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of accountability that are eligible for Title I funding to those who do not receive Title I funding?

5. Is there a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of accountability of middle-level principals with five or more years of administrative experience to those with fewer years of administrative experience?

6. Is there a statistically significant difference between middle-level principals' perceptions of accountability with previous middle-level experience to those who do not have previous middle-level experience?

7. What are middle-level principals' perceptions regarding their university principal preparation programs and district preparation for accountability mandates.

8. Are middle-level principals' concerned about No Child Left Behind and professional development needed to help principals meet accountability mandates?

Perceptions of Personal Accountability

Principals in this study perceived ethical accountability as the highest indicator of personal accountability. Since the sample population consisted of attendees of the National Middle School Conference, it was not surprising that the middle level principal perceptions regarding accountability correlated to assertions by Clark and Clark (2006) that middle-level leaders must be ethically accountable to facilitate effective improvement in an environment of accountability. This perception of personal accountability was further supported by the NASSP Study team findings (2004) that concluded principals of the six highly successful middle schools provided good examples of ethical accountability. Study participants also perceived it important for students to meet high educational standards, encourage faculty members to generate creative solutions to problems, and had a vision and plan for improving academic achievement. These perceptions parallel the standards set forth by The Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 1996) for effective leadership.

Overall, middle-level principals perceived personal accountability as being important and the data analysis showed a higher agreement for personal accountability statements. Surprisingly, middle-level principals indicated less support for statements regarding increased accountability positively impacting attitudes about leadership *2.34 (SD = 1.52)*, which contradict Littleton (2000) and Connellan (2003) who found that accountability systems encouraged improvement, and can motivate and create ownership, however, the other aspect of Connellan's research may provide a more reasonable explanation of principal perceptions because Connellan also found that accountability

may also intimidate leaders which may have influenced principal perceptions regarding increased accountability measures.

The lack of support regarding personally accountability mandates can also be partially attributed to principal perception that there is a lack of funding required to institute federal mandates. Qualitative data indicate principals perceive, "there is no monetary support for these initiatives and no long-term professional training for teachers/administrators and asserted that, "money there is none (or not much) provided for all of the changes being asked us!" Additionally, principals perceived federal mandates as being unrealistic and unattainable. One primary concern was that accountability mandates may negatively impact subgroups that include special education students and English language learners because there is a "lack of accommodation for differences." One principal stated, "expectations of 100%--- setting everyone up for failure--- even assembly lines which have total control over the raw materials have 'seconds' and 'irregulars' …We have no control over our raw material …and we're expected to get 100% compliance."

Although supportive of being personally accountable for student achievement, principals were not supportive of federal mandates used to promote student achievement. Principals perceive NCLB places too much emphasis on high stakes testing and fails to recognize the individuality of student performance and learning styles. These perceptions may be explained by the fact that NCLB's focus on testing as a measure of accountability is in direct opposition to the middle school concept which seeks an integrated approach to be supportive of the affective needs of young adolescents (Clark & Clark, 2006).

Furthermore, middle-level principals perceive themselves as having limited time for providing individual coaching, mentoring and professional growth opportunities which Datnow and Castellano (2001) note are critical for implementing successful school improvement.

<div align="center">Perceptions of Educational Accountability</div>

Middle-level principals that participated in the study perceive that teachers *5.75 (SD = 1.18)* and principals *5.85 (SD = 1.07)* should be held accountable for student achievement. These average scores were not as high as were observed for the personal accountability but they still indicate principals perceive educational accountability as being important for student achievement. The decreased perceptions of accountability could be related to several factors, rewards and sanctions associated with educational accountability, the perception that current accountability mandates only impact Title-I schools, or what Rallis and MacMullan (2000) consider to be the principals' perception that the data collected originated outside the principals work environment. If principals perceive the standard of measure as being based on factors outside of their sphere of influence then they may perceive a diminished degree of educational accountability. This is supported by principal responses indicating that "the labels assigned to schools are not valid pictures of the total school program," and that "we've really lost our soul-by that I mean, what has happened to the psycho-social-affective domain, things we used to emphasize at the middle level?"

<div align="center">Perceptions of Principals' Competencies: Implementing Accountability Mandates</div>

The middle-level principals in this study perceived themselves to be competent in successfully implementing and accomplishing accountability mandates.

This is particularly apparent when that perception concerns building a school culture that supports and sustains improved student academic achievement and concerns their ability to implement middle level education programs. While still indicating a level of competency, the principals perceived themselves less competent about their ability to interpret, analyze, and use data to improve student achievement. These perceptions are complemented by qualitative statements, and research by Cross and Rice (2000) which note the complexity of translating the results of data analysis.

Principal Preparation

Principals indicated that they perceive themselves as being competent to implement accountability mandates for improved student achievement, yet, perceived their principal preparation programs as being inadequate. These findings are supported by Anfara et al., (2006), which indicated a lack of formal principal and teacher preparation in middle-level education. This would warrant the question: How did principals attain their perceived high level of competence? This phenomenon may be attributed to the newness of current accountability mandates and "on-the-job" learning. The "on-the-job" learning may have led principals' to perceive higher competency levels than they actually possess. Clark and Clark (2006) noted that accountability-oriented school reform is often driven by what is considered to be ideal rather than empirical evidence. Clark and Clark (2002b) concluded that clear perceptions regarding accountability are not trickling down to the perceptions of school administrators.

Principals perceived district principal preparation programs to be more adequate than university preparation programs. The justification for this perception may be due to the relatively new shift in accountability paradigms. Districts are able to make swifter

adjustments and filter the information to principals where as university programs take longer to build programs of study and therefore perceived as less adequate.

Professional Development

The findings revealed six domains of professional development relative to the literature review. Those areas were data analysis, leadership training, instructional strategies, collaboration, understanding middle school learners, and differentiation. Professional development has long been considered the cornerstone of an effective school (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2005; Petzko, 2005). Since NCLB requires schools to use data-driven decision making to guide school improvement, it was not surprising that participants rated professional development geared towards data analysis at the top of their list.

Based on the findings of this study, middle-level principals perceived professional development in the area of leadership and instructional strategies to be necessary for functioning in an era of accountability. These findings are supported by Clark and Clark (2006) who affirm that highly successful middle school leaders hold themselves accountable for guaranteeing that their staff is knowledgeable about best practices.

Demographics and Perceptions

Fifty-three percent of the participants were male ($n = 48$), while the rest were women 47% ($n = 43$). The participant gender demographics correlate to national studies of middle-level schools (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2002) that note males dominate the principalship but surprisingly this study revealed a lessening in the gap between males and females in the role of principal. In the sample population 40% of the principals work in a suburban setting (41.8%), 31.9% worked in an urban setting, and

26.4% principals worked in a rural school setting. Interestingly these statistics correlated to those national samples which reflect a recent growth in urban schools and a decrease in schools in rural settings. The majority of the participants had earned a Master's Degree (71.4%), however, dissimilarly the participants had earned more advanced degrees. Specifically, 29% indicated having earned degrees beyond the minimally required master's degree. Although the difference between Title I-funded and non-Title I-funded schools is slight, the greater part of principals sampled did not work in Title I-funded schools (54.9%). Of the those principals that did work in schools that received Title I-funds (45.1%), 62.5 % received full Title I-funding.

The average age of the principal was 46.17 years which is consistent with national averages. The maximum age of the principal was 64; the minimum age was 28 illustrating a wide range of ages between the principals in the study. The wide range in ages may actually skew the mean and mask an older principal population which would coincide with NAESP estimates that 40% of the country's 93,200 principals will retire by 2008 (Doud & Keller, 1998). The average number of years the principal spent teaching at a middle school was 7.36, which is not consistent with Jackson and Davis (2000) who find middle school principals to be fairly new to the middle school environment. The average numbers of year's principals were in attendance at the National Middle School Associations Annual Conference 2.86.

Results of the *Middle-Level Principal Accountability Questionnaire* found one significant finding. This was for the difference between principals with fewer than five years of administrative experience and those with more than five years of administrative experience. This difference indicates that the longer an administrator has been a principal

the more likelihood they feel an increased sense of accountability. However, the mean response for experience for years as a principal was approximately 10 years while the number of years at their current location was approximately 4 years; which indicates that the perception of accountability is not necessary due to longevity to a school site. Research studies have found that as principals deal with accountability issues, their perceptions and competencies are positively associated with their ability to improve student and school outcomes regardless of the school in which they serve (Herzberg, 1984; Marek, 1999; Skrla, 2001).

The results of the study in regards to perceptions of accountability of those who work in schools that receive Title I-funding compared to those who do not work in schools that receive Title I-funding were unexpected. These findings may be attributed to the fact that the majority of the participants did not work in schools that received Title I-funds. Prior research has shown schools in low-income areas perform well on tests, while other studies support a relationship between student achievement and household income level (Barth et al., 1999; NASSP, 2002c); which may explain the results of this study that found principals who receive Title I-funding scored .25 units higher on their perceptions of accountability than those that do not receive Title I-funding.

The results indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between principals with previous middle-level teaching experience and those that did not have previous middle level teaching experience. This was surprising since Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, and Petzko (2004), conducted a follow-up study to the *National Study of Leadership in Middle Level Schools* (2002) that compared the national sample of middle level principals to 98 principals in highly successful schools. Approximately

twice as many principals of highly successful schools had middle level education at the master's specialists, or doctoral level as opposed to their counterparts in the national sample. The results of the study indicated that the principals had approximately 10 years of administrative experience but only approximately 5 years as a middle school principal which supports the original 2002 study which concluded that many of the middle level principals came to the position with little or nor prior administrative background and no expertise in middle level issues. However, these findings can be substantiated by the fact that the average numbers of years spent teaching at the middle level was approximately 7 years. The principal's experience teaching at the middle level could account for the lack of statistical significance for this research question.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The most important limitation to note was the researcher's lack of access to all middle-level leaders' attending the conference. Subsequently, the findings of this study were also limited due to the actual number of participants that were able to participate in the study. The researcher anticipated a return rate of at least 200 but considered a response rate of 100 to be acceptable. The actual sample size of middle-level leaders was 91. The lower return rate may have caused the researcher not to find significance where it otherwise may have been if the return rate was higher.

Implications and Recommendations for the Field

The findings of this study implied that middle-level principals attending the National Middle School Association Annual Conference are satisfied with being held accountable for student achievement in their schools and perceive their competencies and

perceptions strongly support improvement in student achievement. Principals did not, however, support the mandates being used to accomplish improved achievement for all students, and perceived the effectiveness of professional development received as inadequate to meet the new demands for their role in the present accountability environment.

On the post-secondary level, the findings from this study implied that post-secondary institutions that prepare principals need to address current accountability mandates and prepare principals with a better understanding of how to analyze data to improve student achievement. These institutions should design curricula that provide adequate leadership training for improving student achievement and functioning in the era of No Child Left Behind and other state accountability environments. On the district level, the study outcomes indicated a need for more focused principal professional development that assist principals in providing effective leadership and support in dealing with the unique challenges of improving student achievement based on accountability mandates without violating the principles of the middle school concept.

On the national level, the findings of this study indicated that the No Child Left Behind Act is not strongly supported by middle-level principals across the United States. Middle-level principals support increased measures to insure student achievement but do not perceive No Child Left Behind mandates as being the prescriptive cure. Principals also indicated that they are not supportive of high-stake tests, and rewards and sanctions, as effective tools in accomplishing higher achievement in schools.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Several questions were raised as results of this study that could be used for further study on middle-level principal accountability for student achievement in schools. They include the following topics:

1.   Principal skills, competencies, and perceptions identified for improving student achievement in low-income and/or rural schools.

2.   Teacher impressions of their principals regarding competencies and perceptions identified for improving student achievement and of the improvement made in their schools.

3.   Use of test scores as tools to improve student achievement, and variances in improvement between schools who use local and authentic assessments to triangulate data as part of their improvement plans and those that do not.

4.   Effects of principal professional development activities on improvement of student achievement.

Recommendations Resulting From the Study

. The principal plays a pivotal role guided the school to academic success. The following recommendations are made to improve the effectiveness of the school principal in the current accountability environment:

Principal Preparation

1. Principal preparation programs should prepare prospective principals on the value and use of data within the school.

2. Principal preparation programs should include curricula that sufficiently cover and understanding of assessments, and how to analyze and use results.

3. Principal preparation programs should establish curricula that explore research on principal perceptions, behaviors, and other leadership strategies found to improve student achievement.

4. Principal preparation programs should have an external evaluation performed to appraise the quality of the content the program offers for preparing principals for their role in the accountability environment.

The State Office of Education

1. The State Office of Education should advocate for adequate funding for districts to provide principal professional development that specifically assists the school principal in accomplishing improved student achievement and implementation of accountability mandates.

2. The State Office of Education administrators should not promote rewards or sanctions for principals solely based on school performance.

School Districts

1. School district administrators should assess the needs of principals in implementing and meeting the demands of accountability mandates.

2. School district administrators should assess principal perceptions and competencies.

3. School districts should provide mentors and coaches for principals and schools who need assistance in improving student outcomes and in dealing with accountability mandates.

Principals

1. Principals should understand the research in areas of school and student improvement.

2. Principals should actively pursue required staff development opportunities that enable them to successfully complete duties assigned.

3. Principals should understand perceptions and competencies to improve student achievement and implement accountability mandates.

4. Principals should network on district and state levels to voice opinions regarding the effects of accountability on themselves and on their schools.

Summary

The conclusions made in Chapter V identified the perceptions of middle-level principals toward their personal accountability for student achievement, general accountability mandates being used to create improved student achievement, personal competencies and perceptions identified as factors for improving student achievement, and the adequacy of the professional development received for meeting the demands of their role in the present accountability environment.

The findings of this research indicated that principals are supportive of being held personally accountable for student achievement in their schools; however, principals are not satisfied with the mandates currently employed as means to improve achievement, particularly the mandates of No Child Left Behind. Principals are concerned about the effects accountability is having on their school and that various state and federal legislations are inadequate to improve the achievement of all students. The results only indicated one statistically significance difference; which existed between principals with

few than five years of administrative experience and those with more than five years of administrative experience. Moreover, middle-level leaders felt competent in skills needed for implementation and accomplishment of accountability mandates for improved student outcomes.

Possible the most significant finding of this study was regarding the perceptions of principals toward the adequacy of their preparation and professional development for the role they play in school accountability. Principals indicated they do not perceive the preparation they received from their post-secondary administrative endorsement program or the professional development efforts of their school districts as being adequate in preparing them to meet the demands they face in the present accountability environment. It was intriguing that principals perceived their preparation to be inadequate but indicated strong competencies for accomplishing the work of accountability.

Overall, the findings of this study indicated that middle-level principals are poised with the necessary competencies and perceptions to have a positive impact on student achievement, but lack confidence in the system and mandates that govern improvement. The study showed a need for more focused and improved principal preparation and professional development efforts on the post-secondary, state, and district levels.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Participant Demographics

1. ARE YOU CURRENTLY SERVING AS A PUBLIC MIDDLE-LEVEL PRINCIPAL? Yes   No
IF NO, PLEASE DO NOT COMPLETE THE REMAINDER OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE.
2. Gender: ____Male   _____Female

3. Age: _____

4. How many total years of administrative experience do you have (e.g. principal, assistant principal, curriculum specialist. etc...)?
_____

5. Including this year, how many years have you worked as a middle level principal? _____

6. What city/state is your school located? _____

7. Please circle all grade levels served at your school PK K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

8. My school is (please circle one):   1. Urban 2. Suburban   3. Rural

9. Including this year, how many years have you been principal at the current location? _____

10. Approximately how many students do you have in your school? _____

11. Does your school receive Title I funding?   ____ Yes ____ No
    If yes, _____Targeted Assistance   or   _____Full Title I

12. What is your highest degree earned? _____ Bachelor's   _____ Master's
                                         _____ Education Specialist _____ Doctorate

13. Have you taken college coursework in middle-level education? ___ Yes   ___ No

14. Do you have middle-level teaching experience?
     _____ Yes   _____ No   If yes, how many years? _____

15. My registration fees at the National Middle School Association annual conference was paid by:
     ____ District funds   ____Building/school funds   ____Personal funds   ____ other

16. Excluding this year, how many times have you attended the National Middle School Association annual conference?
_____

Instructions: For each of the statements listed, please circle the intensity of the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement.
Scale Index:
        1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) -- 7 = Strongly Agree (SA)

		SD						SA
1.	Principals should be held accountable for student achievement in their schools.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	If principals were personally sanctioned or rewarded based on student performance on state mandated tests, student achievement in schools would improve.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	Expectations for Title I principals are not as demanding as those for non-Title I principals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) --- 7 = Strongly Agree (SA)

		SD						SA
4.	Student achievement based on state mandated test scores is not a good tool for evaluating principal effectiveness.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	Teachers should be held accountable for student achievement in their classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I believe that provisions of NCLB do not provide a means for improving the education of all students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I make a difference in student achievement in my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I have a vision and a plan for improving academic achievement in my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I have effectively communicated my expectations for improvement to teachers, students, parents, and the community.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	I encourage faculty members at my school to generate creative solutions to problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Due to other professional responsibilities, I do not have time to provide individual coaching, mentoring, and professional growth opportunities to faculty members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	I develop teacher-leaders.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	My leadership reflects ethical values.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	Increased accountability and raised standards positively impact a school administrator's attitude about leadership.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	I am concerned about the academic achievement of minority students in my school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	My school community is focused on improving the academic achievement of all students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	My teachers and I consistently use data-driven decision making to make plans for improvements in student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	As a result of NCLB, funding for educational programs aimed at student achievement in my school have not increased.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	It is important for students to meet high educational standards.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	I am concerned about the reputation of my school because of the publication of test results.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	My workload has become unmanageable because of NCLB.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	Because of the recent emphasis on school accountability, I spend less time on instructional leadership.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) --- 7 = Strongly Agree (SA)

	SD					SA	

23. Student achievement is influenced more by factors beyond my control than by factors within my control.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. I believe my school leadership abilities should not be judged by my students' state mandated test scores.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. Due to the recent emphasis on school accountability, I enjoy being a principal less.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. If I were the principal of a school that performed at or above average on state mandated tests, I would feel better about the effectiveness of my leadership.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. I am more concerned about student academic achievement now than I was prior to NCLB legislation.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. I am competent in my instructional leadership skills to improve student academic achievement in my school.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

29. I am competent in my understanding of different types of assessments and what they measure.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. I am competent in my ability to interpret, analyze, and use data to improve student achievement in my school.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. I am competent in establishing school-wide goals and expectations that will improve student achievement in my school.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

32. I am competent in my ability to implement middle level education programs.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

33. I am competent in my public relations skills for reporting test results to parents and the media.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. I am competent in my ability to modify programs where change is needed to improve academic achievement.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. I am competent in my ability to build a school culture that supports and sustains improved student academic achievement.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. My university principal preparation program did not adequately prepared me for current school accountability mandates.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

37. My school district has not taken adequate steps to prepare me for current school accountability mandates.   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

38. What concerns, if any, do you have regarding No Child Left Behind and/or other accountability issues?

39. What specific professional development, if any, do you think is needed for middle-level leaders?

APPENDIX B

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW 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: **26092505**
PROJECT TITLE: **Middle-Level Principals' Perceptons of Accountabiltity**
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: **09/14/06 to 09/14/07**
PROJECT TYPE: **Dissertation or Thesis**
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: **Deena C. Brown**
COLLEGE/DIVISION: **College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Leadership & Research**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: **Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: **11/30/06 to 11/29/07**

Lawrence A. Hosman   *12-04-06*
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.   Date
HSPRC Chair

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
(SUBMIT THIS FORM IN DUPLICATE)

Protocol # 26092505
(office use only)

Name Deena Caisar Brown   Phone 562-728-4616

E-Mail Address deena.brown6usm.edu

Mailing Address CMR 467 Box 6221 APO AE 09096
(address to receive information regarding this application)

College/Division Education and Psychology   Dept ELR

Department Box # 5027   Phone 601.266.4580

Proposed Project Dates: From September 14, 2006 To September 14, 2007
(specific month, day and year of the beginning and ending dates of full project, not just data collection)

Title Middle-Level Principals' Perceptions' of Accountability

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors   N/A

Grant Number (when applicable)

_____ New Project

___X___ Dissertation or Thesis

_____ Renewal or Continuation: Protocol # _____

_____ Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol # _____

_Brown_____   9/14/06
Principal Investigator   Date

_____   9/14/06
Advisor   Date

Ronald Styron_____   9/15/06
Department Chair   Date

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

_____ Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 ( ) ( ), 45CFR46.

___✓___ Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph (7).

_____ Category III, Full Committee Review.

_____   11/20/06
HSPRC College/Division Member   DATE

Laurence A. Loscam   12-04-06
HSPRC Chair   DATE

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION SOUGHT TO ADMINISTER SURVEY

Pam Kuntz
Asst. Coordinator of Affiliate Services
National Middle School Association
4151 Executive Parkway, Suite 300
Westerville, OH 43081

Dear Ms. Kuntz:

     I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Research Department at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am interested in administering a survey to middle level principals attending the 2006 National Middle School Association Annual Conference.

     Increased demands for accountability and school efficiency have placed new emphasis on school leadership perceptions, competencies, and professional development associated with improving student achievement. This study will examine middle-level school leaders' perceptions of accountability. The study will also explore the perceptions, competencies, and professional development needs of middle-level school leaders.

     There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research. All responses to this study will be kept in strict confidence. Only aggregated data will be reported and analyzed. There will not be any attempts to correlate responses to individuals providing feedback on the survey instrument. Participants will remain anonymous. The survey is designed to be completed within 15-20 minutes.

     There are several possibilities for utilizing the results of this study beyond the dissertation. I hope that this study will be used to assist principals in providing effective leadership in middle level schools in the current accountability environment. The data collected may perhaps be used to influence principal professional development activities on the state and district levels. The study might also be used to provide principal post-secondary preparation programs with data regarding the competencies and training needs of middle school leaders.

     This research has significant implications for understanding the needs of middle level leaders. This research will contribute to the growing educational literature on middle-level school leaders.

     If you have any additional questions or feedback regarding the research or survey instrument, please contact me via email deena.brown@usm.edu. The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board will approve this study prior to data collection.

Sincerely,

Deena Cousar Brown

Enclosures

APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER (INFORMED CONSENT)

Middle-Level Principal
Perceptions of Accountability Survey

Dear Middle-level Principal,

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Research Department at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting a research study that will examine middle-level school leaders' perceptions of accountability. This study will also explore the perceptions, competencies and professional development needs of middle-level school leaders. This survey is not endorsed or being conducted by the National Middle School Association.

You were selected for participation because of your status as a public middle school principal. Please understand that your participation, while greatly appreciated, is voluntary. Your voluntary response to this survey constitutes your informed consent to your participation in this study. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participating in this research. All responses to this study are kept in strict confidentiality. No individual identifying information will be collected to ensure complete anonymity.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The study will be used to assist middle-level principals in providing effective middle school leadership. The data collected will also provide principal post-secondary preparation programs with data regarding the competencies and training needs of middle school leaders. This research will contribute to the growing educational literature on middle-level school leaders. When done, please return the survey to the survey collection box.

The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board has reviewed this study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project, you may contact, Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406; (601) 266-4271.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO QUESTION # 38

Principals were given the opportunity to express perceptions on the concerns they have regarding No Child Left Behind and other accountability issues. The following responses were provided by participants.

Question # 38
What concerns, if any, do you have regarding No Child Left Behind and/or other accountability issues?

- Allowing students to transfer from low performing to high performing schools is detrimental to the student and the serving school.
- The whole notion of "highly qualified" is """" especially when being forced to "notify" parents that their child has a teacher that is not highly qualified.
- It is very hard to fit all students into one mold!
- There is no monetary support for these initiatives and no long-term professional training for teachers/administrators.
- The labels assigned to schools are not a valid picture of the total school program.
- Impact that subgroup scores have on school performance scores.
- There seems to be little continuity from state to state
- We are putting so much pressure on our teachers that the critical shortage problem we have will become an epidemic. We currently have to go out of the U.S. to find teachers. What are we doing to our teachers, and our public education system?
- Not all state test are equal. Some states do not have the rigor that other states put on their state test for NCLB accountability
- All we do is test students!
- NCLB stinks. We are an A school that moved 70% of the lowest 25% for each of the last 5 years but we are still considered a school in need of improvement. NCLB does not allow for the development of the whole child.
- I do not believe every child is capable of teaching the highest standards. I do believe all children can learn something. However, I do not believe they can all learn grade level content at the same rate nor to the same outcome.
- We need funding!
- NCLB is leaving more children behind than ever
- NCLB places too much emphasis on high-stakes testing and fails to recognize the individuality of student performance and learning styles.
- Funding needed to support the law
- mandates without funding
- The sanctions placed on schools with unusual challenges within rural communities. More time is needed but the bar continues to move
- There should be accountability for factors outside of school. Also, NCLB, does not take into account ELL, Sp. Ed, etc.. They should learn but maybe not at the

same pace as others. Sometimes teachers feel trapped in teaching due to NCLB requirements. "Does test tell all about what a child has learned?"

- I question it's impact on students with IEP's. The focus on achievement is for education. The sanctions and focus on one assessment is NOT.
- The sanctions and regulation often restrict educational reform. An end in mind is needed before established regulations
- The state of inner-city youth un America as it pertains to NCLB
- It only effects schools that receive Title I funds. If a school that is Title I, does not meet goals-the reality is that the high students leave not the ones that did not achieve.
- The differences between the states' programs and the ways they measure progress/accountability (not comparable data)
- Expectations of 100%---- setting everyone up for failure—even assembly lines (which have total control over the raw materials) have 'seconds" or "irregulars" items. We have no control over our raw material (incoming student levels, etc..) and we're expected to get 100% compliance?
- The expectation that spec. ed students will be able to achieve at the same rate as students w/o special needs.
- Size of school, sub-groups causing some students to be on the "bad" lists, while others "celebrate" meeting AYP because they don't have big enough cell sizes to be held accountable.
- Special education students having to meet same standards when obviously they have a disadvantage or lack of achievement (which is how they qualified for special services)
- That districts don't train leaders to work with NCLB mandates and leave is to flounder
- Where special education fits in to accountability
- mandates with no funding
- revised teacher certification issues in relation to teacher shortage
- We need to make the students accountable first-and the score on one test does not adequately measure what they have learned or what teachers teach or how principals lead
- In a middle school there are so many developmental issues that affect student achievement. If effectively addressed it will make a difference in future achievement. Can't neglect the developmental piece!
- No funding
- Unfunded mandates- increased funding would provide resources for more co-teaching, smaller class size
- I personally feel that NCLB has caused schools to focus on the achievement of all students. I do not think that 100% of children are capable of high school completion on grade level, however, I do feel that all students can learn and should receive support they need to become a self-sufficient adult.
- Continual raising of the criteria is unrealistic

- With the increased pressure and accountability standards, we've really lost our soul-by that I mean, what's happened to the psycho-social-affective domain things we used too emphasize at the middle level
- Special education must be tested in grade level
- Money- there is none (or not much) provided for all of the changes being asked of us!
- Not enough funding to make the changes at federal and state levels.
- we have to figure out the solutions ourselves
- the negative publicity when targets are not met vs. recognition when targets are met
- no consideration to accommodate for the differences of students between schools.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO QUESTION # 39

Principals were given the opportunity to express perceptions regarding specific professional development needed for middle-level leaders. The following responses were provided by participants.

Question #39
What specific professional development, if any, do you think is needed for middle-level leaders?
- How to differentiate to all audiences and make sure all students are being held accountable.
- Professional Development concerning test analysis for all students
- Sustained Professional Development- Initiative such as DI, Backward Design, need to be three-five year process where teachers can learn, practice, tweak, and internalize so that effective student learning happens.
- data interpretation
- Professional development needs to be given to the government officials with no clue about education.
- It truly depends on the teachers that are in your building and what type of PD they already have
- Data Analysis- how to interpret and use the data to influence instruction
- Differentiated instruction
- All the requirements for NCLB, Title 1
- We better understanding of how the adolescent learns.
- What rigor looks like
- Data Analyzing
- Effective and efficient data analysis and what to do with it
- content-specific training at middle level degree in middle-level learning/development
- Understanding the adolescent, understanding the curriculum, scheduling, leadership, program development, community relations, knowledge of elementary and high school curriculum
- culture building, PLC, teaming, scheduling
- data analysis
- building professional learning communities
- sessions/curriculum in content area
- Differentiated Instruction
- Integrating Technology
- They just need to understand the needs of adolescents NMSA provides fabulous opportunities.
- standards-based teaching, technology in class, unmotivated learners
- collaboration
- standards based evaluations/assessments

- scoring student performance to accurately reflect what a child knows or can do at what performance level
- Teaming approach
- role of principals in middle schools
- integration
- Research-based instructional strategies/programs that work with all students
- stress management and motivational, etc..
- Differentiation
- Training in how to manage overfull plates
- How to maximize limited resources time, money, personnel.
- Data and its' use (proper use)
- Collaboration to meet standards.
- Leadership training,
- visioning
- Communication/Listening skills
- team building
- being a catalyst for positive action in a school
- professional learning communities
- collaboration
- assessment
- How to "catch-up" students who are below grade level when they enter middle school
- grading issues
- how to juggle the many hats and how to affect policy change
- Nature and Needs of the Middle School Learner
- Differentiation
- Assessment
- Teaching of Reading
- Leadership skills (inc people skills)
- Anything to stay on instructional cutting edge; something to provide ability to prioritize, organize, and focus building efforts
- How to organize scheduling so students and faculty can best use instructional time. Leaders need to have a firm understanding of instructional practices for all students.
- Specific strategies of funding to seriously close the achievement gap—especially with Black male students
- Using data
- How to be an effective instructional leader/mentor/coaching
- how to teach "today" kids
- High expectations for all students
- Best practices/keeping students engaged
- learning the lingo/language and mindset of the MS student
- Collaboration—how to sustain initiatives over time to show success
- Data analysis- how to guide the adults to implement change

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