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## **Administrative Roles and Experiences of School Principals in an Era of High-Stakes Accountability: A Qualitative Study of the Perspectives of Alabama Principals**

Charles L. Willis Jr  
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ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES AND EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN  
AN ERA OF HIGH-STAKES ACCOUNTABILITY: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF  
THE PERSPECTIVES OF ALABAMA PRINCIPALS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2009

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2009

ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES AND EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN  
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THE PERSPECTIVES OF ALABAMA PRINCIPALS

CHARLES L. WILLIS, JR.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the dissertation was to gain an in-depth understanding of what meaning principals in Alabama made of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into legislation in January of 2002, federal, state, and local accountability mandates have vastly increased. In an era of unprecedented educational reform and accountability, there arose an unrelenting expectation for effective school leaders. The principalship has morphed into one of the most demanding positions in the field of education.

The researcher used a qualitative approach to explore and gather rich descriptions of principals' leadership roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained prior to instigating the research for this study. Ten principals, who represented 10 school districts from across the State of Alabama, comprised this study. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, artifact collections, and site observations. After analyzing all of the data collected, five themes and 21 sub-themes emerged. The five major themes that emerged were Administrative

roles and responsibilities, Collaborative/Shared leadership, Relentless Commitment to Student Success, Professional Growth and Development, and Demands of the Principalship.

This study on the leadership experiences of principals in Alabama is very beneficial for schools, districts, school boards, and universities in validating the complexities faced by school principals, highlighting approaches and proposing effective leadership strategies, adding valuable insight that can inform content to reforming the principalship, structuring district-level professional development programs as well as university administration programs.

Key words: accountability, high-stakes accountability, instructional leader, no child left behind, principals,

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family who has been my source of unconditional love, support, and encouragement. Each of you has uniquely contributed to my journey in your own special. You are truly one of God's greatest blessings to me. I love you all!

Nahketah, my wife, words can hardly touch how I feel about the support you have given. Your unconditional love, support, and encouragement enabled me to take on this educational challenge and see it through to completion. Thanks for believing in me.

Nakesha and Tiffany, my girls, "You are the reason why I do the things I do." Thank you for sharing "Daddy" with his goals, dreams, and aspirations. I appreciate your love, patience, and understanding when my educational endeavors consumed your quality time with me.

Elise, my dear sister, "*We made it!*" Thank you for supporting me, stepping up to the plate, and being willing to assist me with my studies from the time I entered graduate school. I could have never made it without you. Your time and effort was invaluable.

Charles Sr. and Elvira, my parents, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have taught me so much. You taught me the value of an education and supported me in all of my academic pursuits, while all at the same time instilling in me the true characteristics of integrity, humility, and manhood. You also taught me to never give up, and I never will.

Thank you for providing me with a will and determination to succeed.

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I owe a sincere thank you to the hardworking and dedicated faculty and staff of L. M. Smith Middle School for being so supportive, meeting the challenge, and continuing to carry out the mission of providing children with a high-quality education as I had to balance, home, school, and work.

There are very few people in my life that truly understood this process from my vantage point and I am grateful for the support of my fellow colleagues. Barry and Emeka, I have developed through this program, friendships that will last a lifetime. Thank you for sharing every moment, good and bad, academic and otherwise. I am truly honored to call you my friends.

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To my “network” of professors at The University of Alabama at Birmingham and The University of Alabama, colleagues, and special friends, I owe a heartfelt and sincere thank you. Your encouragement and support during tough times really energized me. Each of you has uniquely contributed to my journey, both academically and emotionally, over the past few years.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Reforming K-12 education to ensure that every child has access to a quality education is a growing concern and the focus of the federal government. For over 30 years, America's K-12 system has tried with little success to significantly improve student academic achievement (Solmon, Agam, Priagula (2005). With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into legislation in January of 2002, federal, state, and local accountability mandates have vastly increased. In fact, NCLB both outlined and triggered the "high-stakes accountability" movement that thrust school leadership at the forefront of our nation's educational agenda. In an era of unprecedented educational reform and accountability, there arose an unrelenting expectation for effective school leaders. The position of being a school principal is perhaps the most demanding in the field of education (Buck, 2003). The complexity and ambiguity of the position has grown and the focus of instructional leadership has moved from one of primarily management and supervision to one of shared leadership and change (Marsh, 2000; Senge, 2000; Lambert; 2003; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; & Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The reframing of the role was for principals to lead and not just manage schools. "Over the last decade, scholarship on instructional leadership has become deepened and become more nuanced" (Murphy, 2004, p.66). Tirozzi (2001) reminds us, "the principals of tomorrow's schools

must be instructional leaders who possess the skills, capacities, and commitment to lead the accountability parade, not follow it” (p. 438).

### Statement of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has increased concerns related to accountability for some school leaders (Duvall & Wise, 2004). The complexity and ambiguity of the roles of the principalship have greatly expanded in an era of “high-stakes accountability.” The complexity of the principalship is illustrated in a variety of studies conducted on this topic through the use of various research designs. However, after a preliminary review of available literature, the researcher did not find any qualitative studies that revealed the intense emotional and all-consuming essence of the actual lived experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability

### Purpose of Study

Federal, state, and local accountability mandates have vastly increased since the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into legislation in January of 2002. Over the past five years, teachers, students, and administrators, have spent their time navigating the waters of NCLB together in America’s 95,000 public schools (US Census Bureau, 2006). In the era of “high stakes accountability,” public debate on school quality focuses more attention on school leadership. At this stage in the research, “high-stakes accountability” will be defined as initiatives which seek to instill dramatic improvements in school performance by issuing salient rewards to high achieving schools and/ or imposing stiff sanctions on low performing schools.

The challenges facing school principals are myriad and complex. School principals now find themselves in the public spotlight being personally held accountable for “total” school performance. Under these conditions, the traditional roles of school administrators as managers seem less and less relevant. The federal mandate’s accountability for school principals has challenged and added unprecedented pressure to the efforts of many school administrators thus affecting the way they conduct daily business. Principals, in addition to being recognized as school managers, are now portrayed as critical engineers responsible for creating and sustaining the conditions in schools that support adequate improvement in student achievement. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the leadership experiences of 10 principals in Alabama working in the previously described era of high-stakes accountability.

### *Research Questions*

This qualitative study is designed to explore what it is like to be a principal in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. The central research question was: What meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability?

The sub-questions for this study were:

1. How do principals describe their roles in an era of high-stakes accountability?
2. How do principals operate daily in an era of high-stakes accountability?
3. How do principals develop their skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?



4. How do principals adjust to and handle the unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities?
5. What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals' personal and professional lives?
6. What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
7. What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?

### Significance of the Study

A qualitative study on the leadership experiences of principals in Alabama will significantly aid in identifying and validating the complexities faced by school principals, highlighting approaches and proposing effective leadership strategies that are both appropriate and innovative, adding insight into standards about reforming the principalship, structuring district-level professional development programs more coordinated and connected to university administration programs, and adding to the body of existing literature school leadership in an era of high-stakes accountability.

### Assumptions

1. All participants responded to interview questions willingly and truthfully.
2. Each participant thoroughly understood the interview protocol and interview instrument.

3. Each participant's response accurately reflected his or her perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as well as indicates their daily practices.
4. The sample of participants was representative of Alabama principals.
5. Each participant had an understanding of administrative roles and responsibilities in an era of high-stakes accountability.

#### Limitations of Study

1. This study is limited to 10 practicing principals in the State of Alabama and may not be generalizable to other states and areas in the United States.
2. This study is limited to practicing principals of public schools in Alabama and does not include the practices or behaviors of principals in the private school sector.
3. This study focused on selected principals in Alabama who met the specified criteria and could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon.
4. Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative results, the researcher may have introduced biases into the analysis and interpretations of findings.

#### Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms were operational for this study:

1. Accountability (Accountability System): The demand by a community (public officials, employers, and taxpayers) for school officials to prove that money invested in education has led to measurable learning. "Accountability

testing" is an attempt to sample what students have learned, or how well teachers have taught, and/or the effectiveness of a school's principal's performance as an instructional leader. School budgets and personnel promotions, compensation, and awards may be affected (Assessment Terminology: A Glossary of Useful Terms).

2. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): As defined by each state under section 1111(b) (2) of the *No Child Left Behind* Act, "adequate yearly progress" is the measure of yearly progress of the state and of all public schools and school districts in the state toward enabling all public school students to meet the state's academic content and achievement standards.
3. High-stakes Accountability: Initiatives which seek to instill dramatic improvements in school performance. While these policies take different forms, they generally try to strengthen the incentives for school improvement by issuing salient rewards to high achieving schools and/or by imposing stiff sanctions on low performing schools (Malen, B. and Rice, J., 2003, p. 1).
4. High-stakes Testing: Any testing program whose results have important consequences for students, teachers, schools, administrators, and/or districts. Such stakes may include promotion, certification, graduation, or denial/approval of services and opportunity. High-stakes testing can corrupt the evaluation process when pressure to produce rising test scores results in "teaching to the test" or making tests less complex (Assessment Terminology: A Glossary of Useful Terms).

5. **Instructional Leadership:** Involves setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers. Instructional leadership is those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning (Flath, 1989). Instructional leader makes instructional quality the top priority of the school and attempts to bring that vision to realization.
6. **No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB):** Public Law 107-110. President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law on January 8, 2002. The Act is the most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since ESEA was enacted in 1965. It redefines the federal role in K-12 education and will help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. It is based on four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.
7. **Principal:** Includes those persons certified for the position of principal as prescribed by the State Board of Education and who are employed by an employing board as the chief administrator of a school, including a vocational center (Code of Alabama 1975 (2001 Replacement), 16-24B-2 (7)).
8. **School Reform:** Reform-driven activities are those that alter existing procedures, rules, and requirements to enable the organization to adapt the way it functions to new circumstances or requirements (Conley, 1993).

9. Title I: Is a set of programs set up by the United States Department of Education to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families. To qualify as a Title I school, a school typically has around 40% or more of its students that come from families that qualify under the United States Census's definitions as low-income. Schools receiving Title I funding are regulated by federal legislation, including the No Child Left Behind Act. Title I funds may be used for children from preschool through high school, but most of the students served (65 percent) are in grades 1 through 6; another 12 percent are in preschool and kindergarten programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

#### Researcher Positionality

Over the course of my 18-year career as an educator in Birmingham, I have held the positions of teacher/ coach, assistant principal, elementary, middle and high school principal, central office administrator, and a co-teacher in the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program (UTEP) at an area university. In every school I have been employed as the principal, it has faced State or Federal sanctions upon my entry. Within the last six years, I have been navigating the waters of the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 as a middle school principal. During the time, I found myself faced with the challenges and mandates of leading and guiding my school through Title I School-wide Improvement. I became keenly aware of the complexity and ambiguity of the role of principal and how it has grown and the focus shifted from management and supervision

to one of instructional leadership and building capacity for shared leadership and implementing second order change.

In schools that have faced consistent failure overtime, there is almost a “defeated” culture which permeates the school environment. To meet the mandates of high-stakes accountability, a principal must be a catalyst for change, an innovator, motivator, communicator, instructional leader, entrepreneur, budget analyst, community/ consensus builder, and much more. Initially, my colleagues and I found ourselves overwhelmed with the direction and the added accountability of NCLB to the principalship. Principals were now being faced with meeting a rigorous set of accountability standards without a clear understanding of the *new* job responsibilities and expectations, and in many cases without the preparation and training as well.

High-stakes accountability has reshaped the way I think about school leadership and how I go about conducting my daily business in order to ensure high student achievement and meet the mandates of NCLB.

### Organization of the Study

This study documents and explores the complex challenges of school principals working in Alabama in an era of “high-stakes accountability.” This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction to the problem and the background of the study, the purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, and the definition of key terms. The next chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature which discusses (1) Leadership of School Reform

and Change in an Era of High-stakes Accountability, (2) Accountability in Education, and (3) NCLB/ Accountability: Implications for Schools.

An overview of the study's research design, conceptual and methodological framework, participants, methods of data collection and analysis, and procedures for constructing the participants narratives are presented in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the presentation and analysis of the study findings are discussed. The study concludes with Chapter 5, which summarizes the findings and analysis and outlines implications for theory, practice, policy, and future research.

### Summary

In an era of high-stakes accountability, school leaders at the forefront of the school reform movement. Faced with unprecedented demands and roles complexities, principals find themselves with greater accountability, working longer hours, and less appreciated. However, the literature was silent on the actual lived experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. Using a qualitative research approach, the researcher sought to explore, "What meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. Chapter 1 provided the context for this study, a statement of the problem, research questions which guided this study, the significance of the study, assumptions and limitations, definitions of key terms, researcher positionality, and the organization of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Reforming K-12 education to ensure that every child has access to a quality education is a growing concern and the focus of the federal government. For over 30 years, America's K-12 system has tried, but with little success to significantly improve student academic achievement. With the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) being signed into legislation in January of 2002, federal, state, and local accountability mandates have vastly increased (Solmon, Agam, Priagula (2005). Over the past five years, teachers, students, and administrators have spent the majority of their time navigating the high-stakes environments created by NCLB in America's 95,000 public schools (US Census Bureau 2006). According to NCLB 2001, high-stakes accountability involves initiatives which seek to instill dramatic improvements in school performance by issuing salient rewards to high achieving schools and/ or imposing stiff sanctions on low performing schools. High-stakes testing systems, accountability systems, and systems of rewards and punishment have been instituted by almost every state in the Union (Heineche, Moon & Corcoran, 2003).

The high-stakes accountability movement has placed school leadership at the forefront of our nation's educational agenda. The principalship has become multifaceted, highly sophisticated, and pressure packed in this era. Gill (2006) acknowledges that leadership



has become a key issue both in the public and private sector. The position of being a school principal is perhaps the most demanding in the field of education (Buck, 2003). Lovely and Smith (2004) asserted that based on personal experience, the principalship is one of the hardest jobs in education today. Many principals spend an enormous amount of time on a school campus. In many cases, they spend 12 to 14 hours per day trying to meet the needs of those who depend on them for leadership and guidance while attempting to be catalysts for change (Cunningham, 2000). According to a study published by Jackson, Davenport, Smith, and Lutfi (2007), leadership is critical to the achievement of high performance and essential in helping others inspire to attain high levels of performance. It is widely established that the effect of the principal's leadership is vital to the effectiveness of the school towards educating its students (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Lambert, 2002; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, et al, & Rasmussen 2006).

As the pressures grow for schools to be held accountable for achieving high standards, principals have found that their role expectations have swelled to include a staggering array of responsibilities. The federal mandates of accountability for school principals have challenged the efforts of many school administrators, thus affecting the way they conduct daily business. Goldring and Greenfield (2002) asserted that the contemporary image of the principalship and the superintendency increasingly invokes calls for a "special" kind of leadership. The scope of school leadership in the era of NCLB has become even more challenging and created a set of responsibilities. School principals now find themselves in the public spotlight for being held accountable for "total" school

performance. Under these conditions, the traditional roles of school administrators as managers seem less and less relevant.

Accountability is not just another task added to the already formidable list of the principal's responsibilities. It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under careful public scrutiny while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel" (Lashway, 2000, p.13).

Previous research indicated that in addition to their role as school managers, principals are now portrayed as critical to creating the conditions in schools that support improvement in student achievement (Duckett, 2001). Principals are expected to be all things to all people. They are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relation experts, budget analysts, facility managers, and much more. Brown and Dennis (2002) believed that flexible distributive leadership is required to cope with the new demands being placed on leadership.

The complexity of the principalship and instructional leadership is illustrated in the variety of studies undertaken on this topic. As an example, Kelemen (2001) used in-depth case studies to examine the effects school probation has on school leaders in six middle schools located in a single urban school district. Bishop (2003) in another study used mixed-methods to examined principals' perceptions of their leadership behaviors and the leadership behaviors they employ while leading schools that were categorized as Clear, Caution, or Alert. The participants in this study were all teachers who were asked to reflect on the practices of principals. Finally, Ruffin (2007) investigated the actual lived experiences of urban principals in the Philadelphia Public School System regarding their own instructional leadership.

## Leadership of School Reform and Change in an Era High Stakes Accountability

A generally accepted philosophy is that effective leadership is at the heart of every successful organization. In today's school environment, principals' responsibilities have increased significantly to include the accountability for the success of all students as well as responsibility for "total" school operations. The evolving nature of the school environments has placed new demands on principals. Strong emphases are being placed on instructional leadership skills to promote quality instruction and high academic achievement. Principals must further accept and share ownership not only for students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their personal, social, emotional, and physical development. The new expectations of school leaders place a premium on principals who can create a vision of success for all students, as well as use their skills in communication, collaboration, and community building to ensure that the vision becomes a reality.

### *Historical Perspectives of Reform Movement in Education*

The call to enhance accountability in education has provided a central focus of educational reform. Education reform is a plan or movement which attempts to bring about a systematic change in educational theory or practice across a community or society (U.S. Department of Education). Educational reforms are not new to education and have been a part of schools for some time. As the public school movement proliferated in the United States, the federal government has taken more interest and provided more curricular guidelines and programs. It is important to note that every era

of deep social change in U.S. history has produced incessant calls for social improvement through the reform of the public schools.

Tracing history, federal involvement in education dates back to the post-1776 era. Until the 19th century, U.S. public school curricular history focused primarily on the New England region, for the middle colonies utilized parochial schools as their central focus, while the southern colonies concentrated on tutoring and small group instruction for the plantation owners' children (Button and Provenzo, 1989, pp. 34-44). However, with the writing of the U. S. Constitution public schooling was an important part of the emerging country's growth and made public education a states' right, and thus the establishment of the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment was created in 1791. From 1802 until 1895 the federal government began its first series of interventions to aid and assist public education. Their interventions came in the form of specific grants given to select organizations, schools, and institutions. Initially, there were five such grants (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003, pp. 204-205). In 1819, the Connecticut Asylum for Teaching Deaf and Dumb was founded and received a land grant for that operation. In 1857, similar to the New England grant, the Columbia Institute for the Deaf in Washington, D.C., was founded. Howard University, after much post Civil War negotiations, was given a grant for African American education in 1879. In the U. S. Government's efforts to not only to reward the deaf and Negro educational means, it awarded its first grant to the American Printing House for the Blind in 1879. In 1895, Women's Education, the Institute and College for Girls received federal grant aid (Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003, pp. 204-205).

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1892 were the first federal interventions to have national implications. Built on the Northwest Ordinance of 1785-1787's land granting act, the

Morrill Acts gave 30,000 acres of public land for each senator and representative it had in Congress (Tanner and Tanner, 1990, pp. 73-79). The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1892 further added accountability to the curriculum, as did unparalleled school growth, and curriculum wars debating schools as places of business or knowledge (Arif & Smiley, 2003).

The history of accountability in the United States is most frequently associated with the efficiency movement, and to the scientific management, both of which emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the efficiency era, the concept of organizing factories and making them efficient made their way into public schools. The role of educators became prescribed as a set of principles for the operation of schools (Kuchapski, 2008) The efficiency movement was aligned with a focus on vocationalism that provided “an exact statement of what [would] later be called accountability, functional literacy, career education, competency-based education, competency-based career education and more” (Wise, 1979, p. 84). The ideology of earning over learning developed and would transcend the next few decades in U. S. history.

Emphasis on educational accountability would wane until the late 1950's when the success of Sputnik created a linkage between education and national security. A national alarm was sounded. As a result, a plethora of legislation was enacted to bolster the apparent lag of U. S. public school curricula to those of other countries, especially the Soviet Union (USSR). In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Educational reforms were influenced by initiatives and funding from the Department of National Defense, and from 1965 to 1967, administrators from Health, Education and Welfare were required to attend seminars to learn from the Department of

Defense. The NDEA provided aid to education in the United States at all levels, public and private. Loans were made available to teachers who would teach in depressed areas when they had graduated from higher education sites (Spring, 1994, pp.370-371.). The primary purpose of NDEA was to stimulate the advancement of education in science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (P.L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27, 20 U.S.C. ch.70) is a United States federal statute enacted April 11, 1965. The act provided substantial aid for local schools. ESEA's focus was on aiding high-poverty areas. As mandated by the federal government, the funds were authorized for professional development, instructional materials, and resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion.

The 1966 report of Equality of Educational Opportunity, also known as the Coleman Report, gave rise to the increased interest in school accountability (Prince, 2006). The findings of the Coleman Report indicated that inputs into a school do not measure a quality school. Rather, the report shifted in focus from inputs to results (Evers & Walberg, 2002).

Further, according to Prince (2008) in the 1960's, federal programs such as Title I began being evaluated and measured for effectiveness. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas, significantly influenced and heightened the accountability movement by developing qualitative means of measuring education efforts in America. Sciara & Jantz (1972) acknowledged that as budgets for education began to increase, the public increased its demands for accountability in schools and increased student achievement.

During the 1970's and 1980's, accountability movements began to spread and shift toward minimum competency testing. Instructional leadership also emerged as an outgrowth from early research on effective schools (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Edmonds, 1979). In 1981, the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act were passed as well. The federal government was furthering its efforts in addressing societal and curricular inequities, job hunting, and training skills of at-risk young people. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released. The landmark publication in modern American educational history contributed to the ever-growing, omnipresent sense that American schools are failing miserably, and sparked a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts, and riveted national attention back to accountability in public education. *A Nation at Risk* provided the rationale for the standard raising movement. As a result, basic skills testing were implemented in 34 states across the union as a requirement for high school graduation and principals were now being told by their pre-service programs and professional development providers that they needed new skills. These new skills now being touted as essential skills for being a principal included the ability to manage data, head the school improvement effort, being knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, and having the expertise to guide teachers out of isolated teaching into professional learning communities.

By the late 1980's and moving into the 1990's, the emergence of testing as measure of school accountability had just begun to be implemented. In 1988, the Hawkins-Stafford School Improvement Amendments introduced accountability to Chapter 1 programs. At the 1989 Charlottesville Education Conference, also termed the "Governor's Summit," which was convened by George H. W. Bush, the attendees agreed to fashion "national

educational goals.” These goals would become the underpinning of the 1994 Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) later became “Goals 2000.” The IASA broadened the accountability system under Chapter 1 (now renamed Title 1). The companion law, the goals 2000: Educate America Act, set national educational goals and provided funds for state standards and assessment systems.

The standards based movement of the 1980’s was replaced by the restructuring movement of the 1990’s, which placed its stock in changing the structure, organization, and culture of schools (Deal & Peterson, 1998). During this era, leaders of the restructuring movement argued that dramatic changes in school structures and school culture were needed in order to ratchet up student achievement (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). The principal again assumed a new role: now of being facilitator and leader of structural change. According to English & Anderson (2005),

restructuring of the 1990’s brought the knowledge needed for school improvement back to the school and the role of principals back to the image of leader, servant, organizational architect, social architect, educator, moral agent, and a person in the community. (p. 129).

Principals were told they needed to be "collaborative leaders," "distributive leaders," "visionary leaders," and "site-based leaders." These demands placed accountability at the feet of building administrators. Consequently, the notion of transformational leadership began to overshadow the popularity of instructional leadership. Bass (1985) stated that the origin of transformational leadership began with the study of political leaders and focused on the leader’s role in fostering a collective vision and motivating members of an organization to achieve extraordinary performance.

The lack of progress, however, both in Title I and the nation’s educational system in general, led directly to the NCLB Act of 2001. Signed into legislation on January 8,



2008, this law represented some of the most prominent changes in educational policy. The law further established minimum qualifications for teachers and paraprofessionals and has set goals of all children achieving at the state-defined “proficient” level by the end of the school year 2013-14.

Linn (2000) provided a useful way to summarize educational reforms in the last 50 years. She identified five “waves” of reforms that have occurred in the U.S. They are:

- 1950s: tracking and selection
- 1960s: program accountability
- 1970s: minimum competency testing
- 1980s: school and district accountability
- 1990s: standards based accountability systems.

### *The Changing Role of the Principal: Leadership versus Management*

The challenges and responsibilities for educational leaders have significantly evolved in the era of high-stakes accountability. Over the course of time, school leadership has drastically transformed from a highly prescriptive managerial style to an instructional leadership model. Principals are now, more than ever, aware of the complexities and challenges of public education. Murphy & Louis (1999) asserted that school leaders are aware of the importance of effective educational administration to the enduring good health of schools. The Office of Standards in Education (2000) further emphasized that the story of more effective schools begin and end with leadership and management.

Yukl (1989) stated,

Leadership is a subject that has long excited interest among people.” The term connotes images of powerful, dynamic individuals who command victorious armies, direct corporate empires from atop gleaming skyscrapers, or shape the course of

nations. The exploits of brave and clever leaders are the essence of many legends and myths. Much of our description of history is the story of military, political, religious, and social leaders who are credited or blamed for important historical events.... The widespread fascination with leadership may be because it is such a mysterious process, as well as one that touches everyone's life (p. 1)."

The body of literature and research that exist on leadership reveal that there are numerous ways to define leadership. Northouse (2004) defined leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Maxwell (1996) viewed leadership as having the influence and ability to obtain followers. Patterson (2003) provided a similar definition as he defined leadership as the ability to influence others to achieve mutually agreed upon goals, grounded in moral purpose, which helps an organization stretch to a higher level in the face of adversity. He further suggested that leadership is a set of processes designed to achieve culture change (Patterson, 2003, p. 7). Finally, Burns (1978) pronounced leadership as being a mobilization process by individuals with certain motives, values, and access to resources in a context of competition and conflict in pursuit of goals.

Management on the contrary as defined by Patterson (2003) is a set of processes that keeps a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. He further espoused that, "The most important aspect of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving" (p. 7). Hershey and Blanchard (1993) argued that management is a kind of leadership in which the achievement and success of the organizational goals is paramount. This ideology suggested a reciprocal linkage between leadership and management, meaning that an effective manager should possess leadership skills, and conversely an effective leader should exhibit management skills. Some commentators closely associate leadership with the idea of management.

They view the two as being tantamount, while others consider management a subset of leadership. If one accepts or endorses this premise, one may view leadership as being centralized or decentralized; broad or focused; decision-oriented or morale-centered; or intrinsic or derived from some authority. Patterson (2003) citing Kotter, one of the nation's leadership experts, asserts that leadership and management are two complimentary systems of action. However, Patterson (2003) again citing Kotter acknowledged that successful culture change is 70 to 90 percent leadership and only 10 to 30 percent management (p. 7). Therefore, even though management and leadership are complimentary, for the purpose of leading change, leadership is most crucial (Patterson, 2003, p. 7).

As school organizations are facing changes and challenges never before experienced, leadership versus management continues to be a fiercely debated subject for many commentators. For example, Abraham Zalenik (1990) delineated the differences between leadership and management. He viewed leaders as inspiring visionaries, concerned about substance; while he saw managers as those concerned about processes. Bennis (1989) suggested that the difference between leadership and management can be summed up as "the difference between those who master the context and those who surrender to it (p. 4)." He further asserted a clear distinction between managers and leaders. He explicated twelve distinctions between the two groups:

- Managers administer, leaders innovate;
- Managers ask how and when, leaders ask what and why;
- Managers focus on systems, leaders focus on people;
- Managers do things right, leaders do the right things;

- Managers maintain, leaders develop;
- Managers rely on control, leaders inspire trust;
- Managers have a short-term perspective, leaders have a longer-term perspective;
- Managers accept the status-quo, leaders challenge the status-quo;
- Managers have an eye on the bottom line, leaders have an eye on the horizon;
- Managers imitate, leaders originate;
- Managers emulate the classic good soldier, leaders are their own person;
- Managers copy, leaders show originality.

In Birch's (1999) analysis of the distinctions between leadership and management, he found that, as a broader generalization, leaders concern themselves with people while managers concern themselves with tasks. He suggested that the difference can be attributed to the leader realizing that the achievement of the task comes about through the efforts of people and the support of others (influence), while the manager may not have an understanding of this concept. He believed that this effort and support originates out of the leader having a humanistic side and seeing people as people, rather than just another resource by which to get a task accomplished. According to Birch (1999), some of the worst managers tend to treat people as just another interchangeable item.

Pitcher (1994) in her study challenged the division of leaders and managers. Using a factor analysis technique on data gathered over an 8-year period, she found that three types of leaders exist, with extremely different psychological profiles. She coined these three types of leadership as Artist, Craftsmen, and Technocrats. In explaining her assigned designation of the three types of leaders, Pitcher (1994) described the "Artist" as

imaginative, inspiring, visionary, entrepreneurial, intuitive, daring, and emotional. She further saw the “Craftsmen” as being well-balanced, steady, reasonable, sensible, predictable, and trustworthy. And lastly, she regarded the “Technocrats” as being cerebral, detail-oriented, fastidious, uncompromising, and hard-headed. Pitcher (1994) does not suggest or speculate that any one profile offers a preferred leadership style. However, she asserted that a well-balanced leader exhibiting all three sets of traits are extremely rare.

In summary, people who understand the relationship and correlation between leadership and management and are willing to accept inclusively all aspects of the position, tend to lead effective organizations. Highly successful leaders or executives need to apply both disciplines in a balance appropriate to the enterprise and its context. Leadership without management may yield steps forward, but as many if not more steps backwards. Management without leadership will avoid any step backwards, but doesn't move the organization forward. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, leadership skills are not only needed to manage a school and coordinate a variety of activities, they are also used to support engaged learning and to encourage human creativity and interaction.

### *21<sup>st</sup> Century Perspective: The Principal as the Instructional Leader*

It is widely accepted that the principalship has changed over the last 20 years and still continues to evolve rapidly (Marsh, 2000; Lambert, 2003; Mitchell and Castle, 2005; Wagner, Kegan, et. al, 2006, p.xvi). No longer is the school leader charged with making sure the books are in place, the hallways are clean, and the buses run on time. The perspective of instructional leadership is generally thought to have gained momentum

following the effective schools movement that categorized education during the 1970s and provided acknowledgement that the principal could strongly influence teaching and learning. By the middle of the 1970's, managing curriculum reform and federal program compliance took a more prominent role in the principal's work (Hallinger, 1992, p. 35). Edmond's (1979) seminal study on effective schools, along with a collaborative study he conducted with Frederiksen, analyzed test data from 2,500 randomly selected poor and minority students, from 20 public schools in the Model Cities Neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan, to determine the characteristics of effective schools. The study revealed the following characteristics: the school's atmosphere; alignment of all resources to support instruction; frequent monitoring of student progress; a climate of expectation that all students would achieve; and "a strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together" (Edmond, 1979, p. 22). Thus, this study highlighted the importance of the principal's role and opened the door for the concept of thinking of the principal as the instructional leader being accountable for school improvement and student achievement. By the early 1980s, the role of instructional leader had totally emerged, shifting emphasis from principals being managers or administrators to instructional or academic leaders. The shift was significantly influenced by research which provided recognition that effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Brookover and Lezotte, 1982). Lezotte (1994) supported this assertion when he wrote that, "All the effective schools' research studies on elementary, middle, and secondary levels have repeatedly identified instructional leadership as critical." (p. 20). However, in the first half of the 1990s, "attention to instructional leadership seemed to waver, displaced by

discussions of school-based management and facilitative leadership.” (Lashway, 2002, p. 1).

Flath (1989) defined instructional leadership as those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning. Instructional leadership differs greatly from that of a school administrator or manager in many ways. Principals who take pride in being administrators preoccupy themselves with administrative duties as compared to principals who consider themselves as instructional leaders. The principal, as the instructional leader makes instructional quality the top priority of the school, and works to bring about a common vision of realization. A number of studies (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Freedman & Lafleur, 2002; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Sagor, 1992) provide supporting evidence that when principals visit classrooms frequently, addressing curriculum and instructional problems, and making curriculum and instruction their highest priority, teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness improves. The principal needs to possess a current and extensive knowledge on three areas of education; curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In addition, the role of instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers. Instructional leadership expands toward a deeper involvement in the core business of schooling which is teaching and learning. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001) defined instructional leadership as “leading learning communities” (p. 20). In leading learning communities, staffs meet regularly to discuss their work, work collaboratively to find resolutions to problems, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for student academic achievement. People in learning communities operate in networks of shared,

complimentary expertise rather than in established hierarchical structures or in isolation. Instructional leaders make adult learning a priority; set high expectations for performance; create a culture of continuous learning for adults; and obtain the community's support for the school's success (Phillips, 2004). Blase and Blase (2000) views instructional leadership in terms of specific behavior such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling effective instruction, soliciting opinions, supporting collaboration, providing professional development opportunities, and giving praise for effective teaching.

An era of school accountability has significantly changed the principalship. In a review and careful analysis of articles on school leadership in four widely respected peers reviewed journals, covering a ten year period, from 1988, Leithwood and Duke (1999) noted that instructional leadership was the most frequently mentioned educational leadership concept found in the literature. Acknowledging this reality, Anderson (2004) stated that, "the principalship is probably the single most powerful force for improving school effectiveness and achieving excellence in education" (p.84). Over time, school leadership has drastically evolved from a highly prescriptive managerial style to an instructional leadership model. Lashway (2002) further noted that, "Today, instructional leadership remains the dominant theme, but it has taken on a more sophisticated form" (p. 3).

In the wake of the NCLB Act 2001, instructional leadership has made resurgence with increasing importance placed on academic standards and the need for schools to be accountable. This perspective on principals as agents of change and being accountable for student achievement has created a demand for principals to demonstrate instructional



leadership through strategies and interventions aimed at improving the teaching and learning process. This focus on accountability, with its emphasis on student improvement imposed new demands on schools and school systems (Boris-Schacter and Langer, 2002; Harris, 2000; Leithwood and Lois, 1998; Visscher, 1999). In 2003, Joseph Murphy and Amanda Datnow conducted a study that concluded that principals played a vital role in the success of comprehensive school reforms by performing several key functions:

- Demonstrating their acceptance and strong support of reform efforts;
- Supporting reform efforts by locating and allocating resources, as well as buffering efforts from external distractions;
- Providing a collaborative work environment, nurturing teacher involvement and leadership.

School leadership has morphed as a career defined with many roles and responsibilities. Today, the school principal wears many hats being a manager, administrator, instructional leader, and curriculum leader at various points during each day. They are held accountable for “total” school performance including student performance on standardize test, attendance, school safety, and graduation rates. School leaders further find themselves responsible to a greater community and stakeholders (parents, the school board, students, and the district, state, and federal governments) and are expected to balance their many, often conflicting demands, while maintaining student learning as the central focus. It is a constant juggling act to balance the many different roles coupled with the challenges of being inhibited by rules, regulations, and restrictions, imposed at the district, state, and federal level.

Spiri's (2001) 10-month study of 12 principals in the School District of Philadelphia examined the nature of their emerging roles and responsibilities in high-stakes accountability, the way in which they have interpreted their roles as instructional leaders in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities, challenges, managerial opportunities, and accountability regarding enhanced student achievement. The principals in this study included elementary and middle school principals from four parts of the city. The principals met as a focus group on 13 occasions totaling more than 34 hours of contact time. The principals further participated in two interviews which were maintained in journals. The results of the study reverberated with those obtained through teacher and principal interviews as a part of a larger more comprehensive evaluation. The findings revealed that principals often felt that they lacked organizational support for change when reforms confronted the status-quo legacy of bureaucracy, anonymity, and compliance. Sandwiched between public accountability systems, (NCLB), predicated on the belief of universal excellence and the challenges of a cultural nexus of compliance, the principals felt a new type of vulnerability. They expressed a sometimes-debilitating sense of accountability with very limited authority.

Habegger (2007) conducted a qualitative study to determine specific leadership practices and emphasis that are perceived to positively impact student achievement. The study included schools which were designated as Ohio Schools of Promise, a distinction for schools which had made great strides despite low socioeconomic status. The study found or perceived that a major reason why students were achieving great success in these schools was principals were able to create a culture where adults and students both

excelled. They engaged in activities and practices that created a sense of belonging for all stakeholders. Also, they successfully provided clear direction for students and teachers.

Tracy (2007), using quantitative analysis, examined the perception of middle school principals on the skills required to implement the Public Schools Accountability Act in Southern California. The entire population of one hundred sixty-seven middle school principals in Orange and San Diego Counties were sent surveys. The study yielded a 59 percent return rate. As identified by principals, the most important skills required by principals receiving the highest mean score were empowering faculty members and students to reach high levels of performance; creating and communicating a school vision; assessing student achievement data; aligning financial, human, and material resources with the vision, mission, and goals of the school; and establishing priorities in the context of the community culture, students, and faculty needs.

As a result of all the new expectations being placed on the role of the principal, new perspectives on what principals should know and be able to do emerge. These perspectives were addressed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure and Consortium (ISLLC) and the Alabama Standards for School Administrators. ISLLC operates under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a national non-profit organization of the “public officials that head departments of elementary and secondary education” in the country (CCSSO, 2006). The consortium developed standards for school leaders which are now known as ISLLC standards. These standards address the complexity of instructional leadership, as well as, places an emphasis on learning for all students and community building that are the cornerstones of the 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective of instructional leadership. The standards were further updated in 2008 (Appendix J). The

CCSSO's updated ISLLC standards organize the functions that help define strong school leadership under six standards. These standards represent the broad, high-priority themes that education leaders must address in order to promote the success of every student (CCSSO, 2008). These six standards call for:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner;
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts (CCSSO, 2008, p. 3-5).

In 2005, the Alabama State Department of Education took strides to shift the role of principals from their administrative duties to focusing on the teaching and learning happening in schools by adopting the Standards for instructional leaders (Appendix K). The mission of the standards was to enhance school leadership among principals and administrators in Alabama, resulting in higher student achievement for all students. Consistent with ISLLC standards, Alabama's Standards for instructional leadership requires instructional leaders are willing to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and practices; understand and apply research; and to foster a culture of continuous learning of all members of the instructional staff.

In summary, the task of being an instructional leader is extremely complex, multidimensional, and critical to the realization of effective schools. If principals are serious about being successful instructional leaders, they will have to liberate themselves from bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts towards improving teaching and learning. To shift away from “management” towards “instructional leadership” requires a redefinition of the role of principal, one that realizes the critical role the principal plays as the instructional leader in making learning the top priority of the school.

### *The Changing Role of Leader Preparation*

Over the past twenty-five years, a significant amount of data and evidence has been compiled to support the fact that the principal plays a major role in the success of a school and student academic achievement. Yet, sound, research-based knowledge about how to prepare great principals is, at best, sparse (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). It is commonly accepted that not every person can be educated to be a great leader, yet on the contrary, preparation programs must be designed to give those who have what it takes a fighting chance to be successful. Interestingly, many of the descriptions used to characterize instructional leadership during the 1980's are still being emphasized in school leadership preparation programs today, even though there has been a major shift about educational leadership in an era of school accountability. Ruffin (2007) stated that school principals have been aware of the inadequate preparation for some time. Citing Barth (1990), Ruffin wrote, “Studies of very successful practitioners continue to reveal that most regard university coursework as the least valuable component of their preparation” (p.114). Petzko, Clark, Valentine, Hackman, Nori, and Lucas (2002) conducted an online survey of more than fourteen hundred middle level

principals. Their study found that “52% of the principals indicated that their university coursework was of only moderate or little value, and 55% said the same for university field experiences” (p. 6). Gray & Streshly (2008) further espoused that “many practicing administrators complain that the programs currently in existence are simply hurdles to be jumped, dues to be paid – in fact, detriments to recruiting the stars we need to lead schools to greatness” (p. 123). In another study, Hess & Kelly (2005) investigated the content of instruction at a stratified sample of the nation’s principal preparation programs. They sought to answer the research question, “Are principal preparation programs preparing candidates to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities, challenges, and managerial opportunities?” The research examined the programs training the most candidates, the programs regarded as being the most prestigious and more typical programs. A total of fifty-six programs were studied and at least four “core” syllabi were collected from 31 that met the standards permitting systematic coding for a total of 210 syllabi. The syllabi accounted for 2,242 course weeks of instruction. The results of the study indicated that 2% of 2,242 course weeks addressed school management or school improvement. Less than 5% the syllabi included instruction on managing school improvement using data, technology, or empirical research. Eleven percent of the course weeks addressed instructional management issues like curriculum development, pedagogy, classroom management, and learning theory. One percent of the course weeks dealt with school public relations and small business skills. Further, less than 1% addressed parental and school board relations.

With the roles and responsibilities continuing to expand, there is widespread acknowledgement of the need to align preparation programs to the needs of today’s

principals. Arthur Levine (2005), president of Teachers College at Columbia University, conducted a four-year study which gave rise to the stakes in the debate of principal preparation by harshly assessing the quality of educational administration programs. Based on a survey of practicing principals and education school deans, chairs, faculty, and alumni, in addition to case studies conducted of 25 school leadership programs, Levine concluded that “the majority of [educational administration] programs range from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country’s leading universities” (p. 23). Specifically, he noted that the typical course of studies required of principal candidates was largely disconnected from the realities of school management. As a result of Levine analysis and given the increasing demands on school leaders, the question of what candidates are actually being taught in principal preparation has taken on heightened significance.

There is a common acceptance that with few exceptions, principals are currently not being trained for the jobs they are currently asked to do (Levine, 2005; Davis, Darling-Hammond, Lapointe, and Meyerson, 2005; and Hoy and Hoy, 2003). While the role of the principal continues to be redefined, administration preparation programs continued to follow the same traditions of preparation. Grogan and Andrew (2002) believed that University administration preparatory programs “might best be characterized as preparing aspiring principals and superintendents for the role of top-down manager” with the knowledge base built “around management concepts, such as planning, organizing, financing, supervising budgeting, scheduling and so on...” (p.238). Instead of the emphasis on management that was acceptable in the past, principals of today’s schools must possess a skills set which enables them to 1) lead instruction, 2) shape an

organization that demands and supports excellent instruction and dedicated learning by students and staff and 3) connect the outside world and its resources to the school and its work” (Hale and Mooreman, 2003, p. 13). Gray & Streshly (2008) suggested that “the focus of a principal preparation program should be on developing leadership behaviors and characteristics that are typical of exemplary principals and that have an impact on the school” (p. 121). This notion requires that we embrace the belief that research-based determinants should replace the old consensus-based standards. Gray and Streshly (2008) supported this notion in their study by suggesting that re-design be called for in educational leadership programs in two categories, pedagogy and curriculum.

In affecting re-design in the pedagogical category, they generalized the need for practical experiences to be integrated throughout the programs components. They suggested the incorporation of mentors throughout the program. This would provide a realistic point of reference for administrative candidates. Mentoring has been credited with having significant benefits as an effective career development and management training tool as well as offer a number of organizational benefits such as employee retention, effective succession planning, and increased organizational commitment. They also emphasized the need for field experience. Citing a study by (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlack, 2003) which found that regardless of training, most principals thought they learned the skills they needed on the job, Gray and Streshly (2008) believed “the closest thing to on-the-job-training is the administrative preservice is field experience” (p. 124). This assertion gave validity to the case of the hands-on fieldwork aspect of administrative development. Gray and Streshly (2008) recommended that the essential knowledge be organized around problems of practice or use a problem-based



approach. This approach allows administrative candidates to investigate, research, and learn through hands-on experience. Barnett (2004) supported this recommendation by advocating for the importance of using authentic instructional practices and assessments throughout the preparation program. He further stressed the need for the application of content through assignments that reflect practitioners' activities and schedules. Gray and Streshly (2008) also suggested that administrative preparation programs concentrate on research. This recommendation highlights the need for keeping instruction at the center of everything we do. Educational leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must possess refined research skill and the scholarly backgrounds necessary to become instructional leaders in high-performing schools.

In preparing administrators from a curriculum perspective, Gray and Streshly (2008) recommended eliminating the myths, teaching the necessary human relations skills, and studying great leaders. The concept of eliminating the myths requires administrative preparation programs to eradicate notions and beliefs which have been used to prop up the status quo. This philosophy requires administrative action to be based on a collection of empirical data. Citing (Fraze & Streshly, 2000), Gray and Streshly (2008) wrote that course curriculum in the preparation of school leaders should include rigorous examination of the axioms and the truths we build our schools around – from state and national testing to grouping and grading, and from teacher evaluation to school size.

Highly ranked among leadership skills and behaviors of successful school administrators are human relation skills. School leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires principals to be able to build strong human relationships and work collaboratively with all stakeholders. The new role of the principal requires school leaders who can create a

vision of success for all students, and use their skills in communication, collaboration, and community building to ensure that the vision of the school becomes a reality. Gray & Streshly (2008) who championed the belief these skills are acquired stated “contrary to popular opinion, human relation skills can be taught” (p.125.) They further supported the ideology administrative candidates deserve programs that emphasize these essential and all too critical leadership skills.

In an effort to prepare great leaders, Gray & Streshly (2008) stated, candidate must focus on what great leaders do (p. 125). They advise that program coursework should include the study of historically great leaders, along with recognized outstanding principals in the field. They further made the inference that military leaders have been educated this way for centuries and thus, it is time to use this technique to improve our school principals.

#### Accountability Era in Education: No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act 2001

Education was a concern and focus of early settlers and the founding fathers in the writing of the Constitution precisely because our democracy is dependent on an educated public (Paige, 2004). Recognizing the universal importance of education, the federal government assumed a larger role in financing public schools with the passage of the (ESEA) Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. The ESEA was an extensive statute proposed to fund primary and secondary education. As mandated in the ESEA, the funds are authorized for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion.

Through considerable effort over the past decades, researchers have contributed a great deal to our understanding of adolescents and adolescent literacy learning. Reviews in the *Handbook of Reading Research* have provided useful syntheses of this research (Bean, 2000), as has the International Reading Association's *Summary of Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement* (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999).

Despite these advancements, the U.S. federal government recently launched an unprecedented push for an overhaul of early literacy education in the form of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In signing this legislation, President George W. Bush optimistically declared a new era, and a new time for public education in our country in which all schools will have higher expectations. Bush stated that –“we believe every child can learn; From this day forward, all students will have a better chance to learn, to excel, and to live out their dreams” (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2002).

With NCLB, President George W. Bush captured the frustration felt by many about the progress, or lack of progress, in U.S. schools. President Bush noted,

As America enters the 21st Century full of hope and promise, too many of our neediest students are being left behind.” Today, nearly 70 percent of inner city fourth graders are unable to read at a basic level on national reading tests. Our high school seniors trail students in Cyprus and South Africa on international math tests. And nearly a third of our college freshmen find they must take a remedial course before they are able to even begin regular college level courses. (Bush, 2001, p.1)

These claims are especially disturbing considering that the federal government spends \$120 billion each year, while states and local communities spend additional untold billions on elementary and secondary education. In short, for the amount being spent, many politicians argue, the U.S. public has not been getting its money's worth.

In January 2002, the principles of NCLB were incorporated into the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The reauthorized ESEA redefines

the federal role in K-12 education and will help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. It was based on four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work.

### *The History and Description of NCLB*

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110), often abbreviated in print as NCLB and sometimes shortened in pronunciation to "nickelbee", is a controversial United States federal law (Act of Congress) (co-Authored by Democratic Rep. George Miller of California and Democratic U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts) that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performance of U.S. primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and schools, as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will attend. Additionally, it promoted an increased focus on reading and re-authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Elementary and Secondary School Act, designed by Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel, was passed on April 9, 1965 less than three months after it was introduced. This piece of legislation constituted the most important educational component of the 'War on Poverty' launched by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Through a special funding (Title I), it allocated large resources to meet the needs of educationally deprived children, especially through compensatory programs for the poor (Johnson, 1966).

In recognition of the special educational needs of low-income families and the impact that concentrations of low-income families have on the ability of local educational agencies to support adequate educational programs, the Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies serving areas with concentrations of children from low-income families to expand and improve their educational programs by various means (including preschool programs) which contribute to meeting the special educational needs of educationally deprived children (ESEA, 1965, Section 201).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was developed under the principle of redress, which established that children from low-income homes required more educational services than children from affluent homes (Bean, 2000). As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I Funding allocated one billion dollars a year to schools with a high concentration of low-income children. This was the beginning of Head Start (a preschool program for disadvantaged children aiming at equalizing equality of opportunity based on 'readiness' for the first grade), Follow-through (to complement the gains made by children who participated in the Head Start Program), Bilingual Education (targeting mainly Spanish-speaking children), and a variety of guidance and counseling programs. Head Start was originally started by the Office of Economic Opportunity as an eight-week summer program, and quickly expanded to a full-year Program (Lazerson, 1987).

Following the enactment of the bill, President Johnson stated that Congress, which had been trying to pass a school bill for all America's children since 1870, had finally taken the most significant step of this century to provide help to all schoolchildren

(Graham, 1984). According to Graham (1984), Johnson believed that the school bill was wide-reaching and would significantly benefit thousands of children who were most at-need before they ever reached school. It was further Johnson's hope that this legislation would be the start of helping children of poor families overcome their greatest barrier to progress: poverty (Graham, 1984). Johnson (1966) contended that there was no other single piece of legislation that could help so many for so little cost. He believed that spending billions of dollars on this program would somehow manifest itself tenfold as school dropouts changed to becoming school graduates. The assumption behind the bill and Johnson's speech (that more and better educational services for the poor would move them out of poverty) would be soon challenged by the Coleman Report (1966), which argued that school improvements (higher quality of teachers and curricula, facilities, or even compensatory education) had only a modest impact on students' achievement (Johnson, 1966).

In any case, the Elementary and Secondary School Act is an example of political strategy. After Kennedy's assassination, Johnson decided to respond to civil rights pressures and religious conflicts over education by linking educational legislation to his 'War on Poverty'. In a 1964 memo, Keppel outlined three options. The first was to provide general aid to public schools, but he argued that this could generate a negative reaction from Catholic schools. The second was to provide general aid to both public and private schools, but this, besides the constitutional obstacles, would create a negative reaction from the National Education Association (NEA) and large sectors of the Democratic Party who objected to federal aid to religious schools. The third option, the

one that eventually followed, was to withdraw the idea of general aid and emphasize the educational aid to poor children, because this could endorse the support of most groups (Johnson, 1966).

According to Joel Spring (1993), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act had at least three major consequences for future legislative action. First, it signaled the switch from general federal aid to education towards categorical aid, and the tying of federal aid to national policy concerns such as poverty, defense, or economic growth. Secondly, it addressed the religious conflict by linking federal aid to educational programs directly benefiting poor children in parochial schools, and not the institutions in which they enrolled. Thirdly, the reliance on state departments of education to administer federal funds (promoted to avoid criticisms of federal control) resulted in an expansion of state bureaucracies and larger involvement of state governments in educational decision-making.

The Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 was amended in 1968 with Title VII, resulting in the Bilingual Education Act, which offered federal aid to local school districts to assist them to address the needs of children with limited English-speaking ability. The Act was passed in the House of Representatives on May 23, 2001, in the United States Senate on June 14, 2001 and signed into law on January 8, 2002.

NCLB is the latest federal legislation which enacts the theories of standards-based education reform, formerly known as outcome-based education, which is based on the belief that setting high expectations and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education (Lazerson, 1987). The Act requires states to develop assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are

to receive federal funding for schools. NCLB does not assert a national achievement standard. The standards are set by each individual state, which falls in line within the provision of local control of schools, in order to compliance with the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Tenth Amendment specifies and reserves education as a state function. The Act also requires that the schools distribute the name, home phone number and address of every student enrolled to military recruiters, unless the student (or the student's parent) specifically opts out (Graham, 1984).

The effectiveness and desirability of NCLB's measures are hotly debated. A primary criticism asserts that NCLB could reduce effective instruction and student learning because it may cause states to lower achievement goals and motivate teachers to "teach to the test." A primary supportive claim asserts that systematic testing provides data that shed light on which schools are not teaching basic skills effectively, so that interventions can be made to improve outcomes for all students while reducing the achievement gap for disadvantaged and disabled students (Bean, 2000).

Over the time of this law, Congress increased federal funding of education, from \$42.2 billion in 2001 to \$54.4 billion in 2007. This equates to an increase which outpaced inflation by 5%. No Child Left Behind received a 40.4% increase from \$17.4 billion in 2001 to \$24.4 billion.

#### *State and District Implementation of NCLB*

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is designed to achieve an ambitious goal: All children will be proficient in reading and mathematics by the 2013–14 school year Alvermann (2002). A key strategy for achieving this goal is accountability. NCLB



holds schools and districts accountable for their students' mastery of state content standards, as measured by state tests.

NCLB accountability rests on several key premises: that clear definitions and targets for desired academic outcomes will provide both incentives for and indicators of improvement; that identification of districts and schools not meeting their improvement targets will help focus assistance and interventions in places where they are most needed; that widely available information about student performance will enable parents, educators and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about how best to serve their students or children; and that targeted assistance will stimulate school and district improvement (Paige, 2004).

Report findings from the SSI-NCLB and NLS-NCLB summarizes major issues in state, district, and school-level implementation of the accountability provisions of NCLB. It addresses questions in four areas:

- How have states implemented the standards, assessments, and accountability provisions of Titles I and III of NCLB?
- How are districts and schools performing with respect to making adequate yearly progress (AYP)? What are the reasons why schools do not make AYP? Are there common characteristics among districts and schools identified for improvement?
- How is information about NCLB, AYP, and identification for improvement communicated to stakeholders, and how well do district and school staff understand the status of their districts and schools' performance?
- What efforts are being made to improve district and school performance, including state support systems, technical assistance, mandated interventions, and local initiatives?

### *State Standards, Assessments, and Targets*

NCLB is the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB is stricter and more specific than the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), the 1994 reauthorization of the same law (Vandell, 2006). Key NCLB accountability provisions include the following:

- Every state must have in place content standards for what students should know and be able to do in reading and mathematics, and must implement content standards in science by 2005–06.
- Every state must administer annual tests in reading and mathematics for all students, including students with disabilities and limited English proficiency (LEP) - in grades 3–8 and at least once in grades 10-12 by 2005-06. By 2007-08, all states also must assess students in science at least once each in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12.
- Every state must also develop annual AYP targets for schools and districts for all students and for key subgroups of students based on state test results, student test participation rates, and one other academic indicator (such as graduation rate). Increasing AYP targets require that all students demonstrate proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-14.

States were expected to implement English proficiency standards and assessments for LEP students by 2002-03, and these tests must be administered annually. By 2005-06, states were expected to set annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) specifying expected progress in LEP students' learning English proficiency and in meeting AYP targets.

Information on school and district performance was communicated to parents, teachers, and other stakeholders (Redd, 2005). Specific assistance and consequences are implemented for schools and districts that repeatedly do not make AYP. NCLB sets up a series of progressively more serious interventions for schools that do not make AYP for two or more consecutive years (Jenner, 2006).

Jenner (2006) noted First, such schools become “identified for improvement”; the interventions include developing or revising a school plan to address the areas that caused the school to miss AYP, offering parents the choice to transfer to another public school, and in the second year of improvement, providing supplemental educational services (e.g., free tutoring).

Following identification for improvement, schools are also to receive technical assistance from their respective districts and states, and they must set aside 10 percent of their Title I allocations for professional development (Jenner, 2006). After a school in improvement misses AYP for two years, its district must take one of a number of specified corrective actions, followed by restructuring the school if it misses AYP yet again. NCLB also defines consequences for districts identified for improvement and corrective actions for districts. A school or district exits from improvement, corrective action or restructuring status when it makes AYP for two consecutive years. NCLB requires these interventions only for schools and districts receiving Title I funding, although states have the option of applying some or all of the interventions to non-Title I schools and districts using the state’s own resources (LeCroy,2005).

LeCroy (2005) reported In 2004-05, all states had met NCLB requirements for content

standards and were making progress toward meeting NCLB requirements for assessments of all students in all required grades. All states have content standards in reading, mathematics and science, but most continue to revise their standards or adopt new standards.

By 2003, all states had received federal approval for the processes used to develop reading and mathematics standards. Nonetheless, many states adopted new standards or revised existing standards for reading (32 states and the District of Columbia), mathematics (33 states and the District of Columbia), and science (37 states and the District of Columbia) between 2001-02 when NCLB was passed and 2004-05, the year of data collection for this report. As of 2004-05, 27 states and the District of Columbia had instituted yearly testing in grades 3-8 (Vandell, 2006). Twenty-three states and Puerto Rico were still working to implement testing in all required grades for 2005-06, as required by NCLB (Redd, 2005).

By 2004-05, 28 states had instituted yearly testing in grades 3-8 as required by NCLB for the 2005-06 school year, an increase from 12 states with such tests in place in 1999-2000 (Vandell, 2006). Nearly all states also administered high school assessments intended to meet NCLB requirements for 2005-06. States reported that implementing the annual testing requirements was one of the most substantive challenges they faced in the first three years of NCLB (Durlak, 2007). Student “proficiency” has little common meaning across states. NCLB sets the goal of all students reaching proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2014 but allows each state to determine what it means to be proficient (Story, 2003). States varied widely in the levels at which they set their performance standards for proficiency in reading and mathematics. Using the 2003

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as a common external measure, state standards for NCLB proficiency ranged from a NAEP equivalent score of approximately 247 to a NAEP equivalent score of approximately 314, a range of 67 points (Jenner, 2006). Thus, a student deemed to be proficient for NCLB purposes in one state might not be considered proficient in another state.

In 2004-2005, all states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico either administered or were planning some form of alternate assessments for students with disabilities. All states also allowed testing accommodations to enable students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency to take the regular statewide tests (Story, 2003). Alternate assessments are relatively new in most states, but in 2004-05, nearly all states administer some form of alternative assessment for students with disabilities. In addition, all states offered accommodations for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency, including 16 states with native-language assessments. States varied considerably in the proportions of students taking tests with accommodations.

### *Measuring Progress Towards Proficiency*

States use their allowed flexibility to define and amend their AYP indicators, adding to the complexity of AYP calculations and their variability across states (Story, 2003). NCLB requires states to use five indicators to determine AYP: (1) the percent of students who are proficient in reading; (2) the percent of students who are proficient in mathematics; (3) the percent of students who participate in reading assessments; (4) the percent of students who participate in mathematics assessments; and (5) at least one other academic indicator at each school level (elementary, middle, and high school). Even

small differences in the rules for calculating each AYP indicator will affect whether schools or districts make AYP. In addition, as most states have taken advantage of federal flexibility in developing and refining their definitions of AYP, these definitions have changed over time and vary across states.

The variation in states' AYP starting points and thus in how much progress a state must demonstrate by 2014; is strongly related to how high the states set their academic achievement standards for proficiency. In order to develop AYP targets, each state established starting points (baselines) for their NCLB accountability systems (Jenner, 2004). With these starting points in place, each state then charted a trajectory of expected progress toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency. States that set higher performance standards tended to have a lower percentage of students scoring at the proficient level and must therefore make greater progress in student achievement by 2013-14. Put simply, states with higher standards are likely to face more challenges in reaching 100 percent proficiency (Story, 2003).

#### *Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress Targets*

Three-quarters of the nation's schools and 71 percent of districts make AYP in 2003-04. In 2003-04, 75 percent of the nation's schools made AYP as defined by their states, a 2 percentage point increase from 2002-03. However, if many non-identified schools that did not make AYP in 2003-04 did not make AYP again in 2004-05, the number of schools identified for improvement was expected to rise substantially for 2005-06. States varied greatly in the proportions of schools and districts that made AYP (Paige, 2004).

The percentage of schools that made AYP in 2003-04 ranged from 95 percent of schools in Wisconsin to 23 percent of schools in Alabama and Florida. Similarly, the

percentage of districts that made AYP ranged from 100 percent of districts in Arkansas and Delaware to less than 10 percent of districts in Alabama, West Virginia, and Florida (Durlak, 2007).

AYP results reflect state accountability policy decisions. In 2003-04, schools in states that used the scores of students in all of grades 3-8 and one high school grade to determine AYP were less likely to make AYP than schools in states that used scores from fewer grades. In addition, schools in states that set their AYP proficiency levels higher (relative to NAEP) were less likely to make AYP than schools in states with lower proficiency standards (Paige, 2004). Schools that were held accountable for greater numbers of subgroups were less likely to make AYP (Redd, 2005). Sixty-one percent of schools that had six or more subgroups made AYP, compared with 90 percent of schools for which AYP was calculated for only one subgroup. Even after controlling for the level of poverty, schools with more subgroups were less likely to make AYP (Redd, 2005).

After controlling for other school and district characteristics, secondary schools were less likely to make AYP than were elementary schools. Larger school enrollments, higher proportions of low-income and minority students, and greater district concentrations of students with disabilities also were associated with lower likelihood of making AYP. States are responsible for notifying schools and parents about performance. To be most useful, such information should be reported before the school year begins so that both schools and parents have adequate time to take appropriate actions.

### *Creating State Systems of Support for School Improvement*

Nearly all states established systems of support for school improvement; more than half reported providing some level of support to all identified schools. NCLB requires

states to establish support systems to help schools and districts that are identified for improvement. Nearly all states provided some type of support for at least some identified school (Vandell, 2006). Thirty states reported providing some level of support to all schools identified for improvement during the 2004-05 school year. Other states provided support to a subset of identified schools.

The most common mechanisms for supporting identified schools were those mandated by NCLB: school support teams and individual school improvement specialists. Thirty-seven states employed support teams, and, in 14 states, these structures predated NCLB. Twenty-nine states also used individual school improvement specialists, experienced teachers, or administrators external to the district to provide support to schools identified for improvement.

Principals in three-quarters of all schools reported needing technical assistance for some aspect of NCLB implementation (Reisner, 2001). Schools identified for improvement were more likely than non-identified schools to report needing assistance in most areas, including improving the quality of professional development, getting parents more engaged in their child's education, addressing the instructional needs of students with disabilities, or identifying effective curriculum (Redd, 2005). A majority of principals who indicated their schools needed technical assistance reported receiving it and reported that it was sufficient to meet their needs. This was true for both identified and non-identified schools. However, identified schools reported receiving more days of assistance, on average from their districts (15 days) than did non-identified schools (10 days). Identified schools in states with comprehensive systems of support reported



receiving technical assistance in many areas at higher rates than those in states with limited or moderately comprehensive support systems (Durlak, 2007).

Curriculum enhancement was a major focus of school improvement in identified and non-identified schools, but about one-third of teachers in identified schools reported having an inadequate number of textbooks and instructional materials (Redd, 2005). Most schools, regardless of improvement status, were involved in efforts to improve curriculum and instruction, placing particular emphasis on aligning curriculum and instruction with standards (Story, 2003). Most teachers reported having access to necessary resources to align curriculum with standards; however, about one-third of teachers in elementary and secondary schools identified for improvement reported that they lacked sufficient numbers of textbooks and instructional materials. Increasing reading and mathematics instructional time for some or all students was another improvement strategy in many identified elementary and secondary schools (Jenner, 2006). In addition, about half of identified schools reported a major focus on other extended-time instructional programs (such as after-school programs).

Teachers found annual state tests and local progress tests useful for improving student learning in one or more ways. Nearly 90 percent of teachers made moderate or extensive use of state test results for one or more instructional purposes. For example, 80 percent of elementary teachers and secondary English teachers in identified schools reported using the results to identify areas in which they needed to strengthen their content knowledge or teaching skills (Vandell, 2006). Progress tests are periodic standardized assessments that are administered and scored locally so results can be made rapidly available to teachers. The use of progress tests was widespread in 2004-05: More than two-thirds of the schools

supplemented annual state assessments with additional periodic assessments (Fabiano, 2005). Most teachers who administered progress tests reported using the results to identify students in need of remedial assistance or to tailor instruction to individual students.

### High-Stakes: Results of NCLB Since Implementation

The No Child Left Behind Act is designed to provide additional tools our schools and educators to close the achievement gap and help America's students read and do math at grade level by 2014. What works: high standards, accountability, a highly effective teacher in every classroom, more information and choices for parents, and sound, proven methods of instruction. These principles are maintained while targeting flexibility designed to help schools and educators raise achievement (Jenner, 2006).

On the sixth anniversary of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which determines how schools must focus their resources to ensure that all students are meeting grade-level standards by 2014, proponents and critics of the law sparred over how effective it has been in raising student achievement and what kind of changes should be made when Congress is scheduled to renew the measure (eSchool News, 2008).

The White House statement cited gains in reading and math by fourth and eighth graders on the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress, commonly called the Nation's Report Card. Although it's true that U.S. fourth-grade students posted the highest average reading scores in the history of the exam, eighth graders' reading scores were only one point higher than in 2005, said the Alliance for Excellence In Education (AEE). Nearly 70 percent of all eighth-grade students failed to reach

proficiency. Vandell (2006) also noted that American 15-year-olds fell two places in international rankings on science and math, according to the results of the 2006 Program for International Student Assessments. More than 1.2 million students failed to graduate from high school in the United States last year alone. Vandell (2006) further asserted that NCLB, as it currently stands, does very little to address the needs of the nation's middle and high schools, and until the legislation is reauthorized to include the interventions and supports that these schools need to enhance student academic achievement, the educational system will continue to fail millions of American students.

The Forum on Educational Accountability (2007), which represents leaders of education, civil rights, civic, and labor groups, went even further in its criticism of the law. Since the signing and implementation of NCLB the FEA found that reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress have become stagnated, and the rate of improvement in math has slowed tremendously. The most at-risk children in our nation continue to receive an unequal and below standard education. Incremental changes convey very little hope in fixing the law's structural flaws of unrealistic mandates, high-stakes testing, and punitive sanctions.

As an alternative to NCLB, the forum endorses an approach that would overhaul assessment to reduce testing and support multiple indicators of success, as well as fully funding the Title I provisions of the law (Jenner, 2006). NCLB requires schools to administer math and reading tests in grades three through eight, and once in high school. Schools that miss testing benchmarks face increasingly stiff sanctions.

President Bush regards the law, which took effect in 2002, as one of the signature domestic achievements of his presidency, and he sees expanding NCLB as a key to his

legacy. Among those who favor amending the law, there is broad agreement that NCLB should be changed to encourage schools to measure individual student progress over time, instead of using snapshot comparisons of certain grade levels. There also is a consensus among those advocates that the law should be changed so schools that miss progress goals by a little don't face the same consequences as schools that miss them by a lot and that the law should be expanded to include greater accountability for high schools (Durlak, 2007). But deep divisions remain over some proposed changes, including merit pay for teachers and whether schools should be judged based on test scores in subjects other than reading and math, or on other measures of success (such as graduation rates).

Many educators and lawmakers who once supported NCLB now say the law has failed to live up to its promise. One of the law's lead original authors, Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy, defended it, praising what he said are modest improvements that have been seen so far. Yet, in an open editorial published in *The Washington Post*, Kennedy kicked off a series of what he called, "needed reform efforts." Most of all, Kennedy called it "disgraceful" that Bush, his former partner in passing the law, had failed to include adequate funding for school reform in his education budgets. "Struggling schools can do only so much on a tin-cup budget," (p.2) Kennedy wrote. Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, who traveled with Bush to Chicago, disagreed. According to Jenner (2006), Spellings stated that federal education funding was up about 46 percent since Bush took office.

Bush laid out what he said were some changes he would consider making administratively if lawmakers failed to act: ensuring "that a high school degree meant something," increasing flexibility for states and school districts, providing extra help for

struggling schools, and devising an accurate system for measuring high school dropout rates. Bush believes that the country needs to build upon the successes of the law, and that it is not worthwhile to guess when a child's future is at stake (Vandell, 2006).

The U.S. Department of Education already has taken some steps to meet critics' concerns. Spellings granted new flexibility to states and school districts by allowing more states to adopt a "growth model" for measuring individual student achievement over time. Horace Greeley Elementary School was chosen as the backdrop for Bush to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the law's signing, because the school reportedly has thrived under NCLB. The school, where 70 percent of students are Hispanic and 92 percent are low-income, was named a Blue Ribbon School under the program in October of 2006, one of just 12 such public schools in the state and 239 across the country (Durlak, 2007).

Since 2005, 83 percent of Greeley students have met or exceeded state standards, compared with an average of 64 percent for the entire Chicago Public Schools system. Even as Bush and Spellings were marking the law's anniversary, a federal appeals court raised and revived a lawsuit challenging NCLB's funding. The lawsuit argues that schools should not have to comply with requirements that are not funded by the federal government. Plaintiffs include the Pontiac, Michigan school district and eight districts in Texas and Vermont, along with National Education Association (NEA) affiliates in several states. Chief U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman in Detroit dismissed the lawsuit in November 2005, but a three-judge panel of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati reversed Friedman's ruling in a 2-1 decision (LeCroy, 2005).

Legislators had hoped that passage of No Child Left Behind would lead to: 1) greater

accountability for results; 2) more flexibility for schools, school districts, and states in how they use federal funds; 3) a wider range of education choices for families from disadvantaged backgrounds; and 4) an emphasis on research-based teaching methods. The act strongly emphasizes literacy for young children, improving teacher qualifications, and ensuring that every child who attends school in the United States will learn English. While the act was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, many administrators, teachers, and even politicians now see a need to rethink it.

Although NCLB funding increased, the total allocated still falls more than \$5 billion short of what was originally authorized. Testing, hiring of new teachers and paraprofessionals, increasing the qualifications of current personnel, and creating data collection and warehousing systems are examples of requirements that federal spending will not fully cover.

The costs of not meeting requirements are equally high. Sanctions will be placed on schools that fail to meet the adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards. If a school fails to meet AYP for two consecutive years, the school is identified as "needing improvement" and school choice (e.g., vouchers) must be offered to students, at the cost of the "failing" school. If the school does not meet AYP for three consecutive years, supplemental services must be provided through Title I funds. If the school fails to meet AYP for four consecutive years, corrective actions will take place. These sanctions could include replacing school staff, changing the curriculum, decreasing administrative authority, increasing the length of the school day, and changing the organizational structure of the school. If the school fails to meet the AYP for five years, all staff could be fired and the school could be reopened as a charter school or taken over by the state. The authors of

NCLB further reminded state and local officials that education is a good investment.

Positive returns come in the forms of increased productivity, tax revenues, and politically active citizens.

The NCLB Act has created considerable activity in which:

- All 50 states and the District of Columbia have accountability plans in place;
- All 50 states and D.C. assess students in grades 3-8 and once in high school in reading/ language arts and mathematics;
- The percentage of classes taught by a highly qualified teacher has risen to over 90 percent;
- Nearly 450,000 eligible students have received free supplemental educational services (tutoring) or public school choice.

#### NCLB/Accountability: Implications for Schools

The premise of NCLB is that every child in America should be given the opportunity to receive a good education, regardless of the child's race, gender, creed, or economic status. However, limited implementation and information related to NCLB presents significant challenges to achieving the goal of proficiency for every student in reading and mathematics by 2014. To date, America's public school system still remain in immediate need of reform. Without adequate funding, NCLB will continue to be largely an unfunded mandate with extremely lofty goals to be obtained. Ironically, NCLB calls for all children to be guaranteed a high quality education but, many of the schools with the greatest need for improvement, who serve students with the highest levels of need, are grossly underfunded. The increasing number of schools and districts identified for

improvement presents challenges to state and district support systems. Some states and districts still struggle to provide basic resources to schools. For example, about one-third of teachers in identified schools reported that they did not have an adequate number of textbooks and instructional materials. The numbers and percentages of identified schools and districts varied considerably across states, in part due to differences in state standards, assessments, and AYP targets (Jenner, 2004). NCLB has been largely successful in further limiting the education that is being provided to America's lower class. The NCLB act relies heavily on the use of standardized testing in an effort to make sure America's students receive the highest quality education possible. On the contrary, this practice does not represent the most reliable and accurate measure to assess students' true knowledge. Becoming so assessment-focused has tremendously reduced parent and teacher involvement as well as interaction with students. Yet, this ambitious initiative has greatly expanded the federal government's oversight in the school system by requiring schools to show evidence of academic advancement for all their students. This legislation severely usurps the principles in the American school system, particularly that schools and school systems should be held accountable to the families and communities whom they serve, rather than to the federal government.

Schools that are unable to reach their AYP goals will be sanctioned and students will be allowed to withdraw from such schools classified as "failing." This will cause a huge disadvantage for schools that serve this nation's inner-city children, the poor, and rural schools, who are generally in need of the most support and whose students are lagging behind educationally. Such schools are more likely to have low student achievement on standardized tests and will inevitably be penalized for their low performance by receiving



even fewer resources. Further, when a student leaves a Title I school, the school loses funding that it would have normally received from the government to educate economically disadvantaged students. Subsequently, when massive numbers of students are allowed to withdraw from a school or schools, the school as well as the entire district suffers. Sadly and depressingly, the NCLB act is leaving millions of children behind, especially those whose education system is in need of the most reform.

Instead of villainizing teachers and administrators, blaming our schools, and imposing new regulations on America's educators, there is a great need for federal law that makes it possible to raise the standards and expectations in public education in an effort to create a good education system. Such an approach would require assertive efforts to minimize and close the huge, growing inequalities between the poor and the middle to upper class by providing all children access to basic healthcare, food, housing, and preschool education. In summary, although it is evident that our government is trying very hard to reform the education system, far more will have to be done than require students to be tested regularly.

#### Shifting Paradigms to Instructional Leadership: "The Challenge"

For many years, the principal's primary responsibility was to handle all administrative duties of the school. They served as "a Lone Ranger at the top who moves in to take care of all administrative duties and oversee instructional practice" (Mednick, 2003, p. 2). According to Mednick (2003), "the old model of formal, one person leadership leaves the substantial talents of teachers largely untapped," (p. 2). Because the principal handled administrative duties and oversaw instructional practice, the traditional model of

leadership did not provide “quality learning for all students” (Mednick, 2003, p. 2). Comprehensive school reform requires that “principals have a firm understanding of the change process, understand and interpret data, investigate instructional strategies and their research-base, select appropriate approaches, and negotiate with contractors and model developers” (Janc & Appelbaum, 2004, p. 2). According to Janc & Appelbaum (2004), “effective CSR principals thoroughly understand the reform strategies that have been adopted and have made the time commitment to, for example, attend professional development sessions on reading instruction if that is the core goal of the school’s reform strategy” (p. 2). This may be difficult for principals because “these successful principals may have spent time focusing on tasks they were not responsible for in the past, such as negotiating for release time for teachers so they can fully participate in training and planning meetings” (Janc & Appelbaum, 2004, p. 2).

CSR also requires principals to change their paradigm from the traditional principal to an instructional leader. According to Buchen (2002), there are many obstacles that principals face on their journey to becoming instructional leaders. Some of these obstacles are: a) time, b) ability, c) credibility, d) knowledge limitations, and e) evaluation. If principals are to become instructional leaders, they have to not only face these five obstacles, but they must find a way to overcome them. Research shows that “the first obstacle is the most obvious: freeing up enough time for the principal to function as an instructional leader” (Buchen, 2002, p. 1). Effective instructional leaders need time to properly plan for shared leadership, which is the main component of comprehensive school reform.

Buchen (2002) reported that “the second obstacle may not be admitted openly, but it must be identified and addressed: not all principals have the ability to be effective instructional leaders” (p. 1). An instructional leader was not a job requirement for administrators in the past. Many of them were hired to be managers, not leaders. Managers are capable of meeting deadlines, shuffling papers, and ensuring that everything in the school is running efficiently, but they may not be capable of leading an instructional organization. According to Buchen, “they might actually resent the challenge of instructional leadership if they felt it impacted the way they run their schools” (p. 2).

The third challenge that instructional leaders face is that of credibility. Principals who have never been in the classroom or principals who have been out of the classroom for more than five years have a hard time of gaining credibility with the staff. Principals who have not had “the recent experience of trying prepare unmotivated students for high-stakes testing, principals as instructional leaders may appear in the unattractive light of failing to practice what they preach” (p. 2). Instructional leaders who want to resolve this challenge can find ways to go back into the classroom and experience firsthand the challenges that classroom teachers face.

The fourth challenge that principals face is knowledge limitations. Many principals have knowledge in one area, but may be limited in others. This lack of knowledge is a problem for principals because it limits their instructional leadership across the curriculum. How can a principal be an instructional leader if they are not familiar with the curriculum? This is a problem that does not have an easy solution. Principals cannot

possibly learn all the knowledge needed for every area taught in their school, however, they can “function as an interdisciplinary generalist” (Buchen, p. 2).

The final challenge that instructional leaders face is evaluation. “The principal's role as instructional leader requires visibility and communication with individual teachers, and that is best accomplished through the evaluation process” (Buchen, 2002). In order for evaluation to work, it has to be an ongoing process and open communication at every stage. Instructional leaders have to be committed to this process or it will not be an effective educational practice. If the process of evaluation is handled correctly, then it enhances the instructional leadership of everyone involved in the process- the principal, teacher, and ultimately the students.

### The Stress of Change

One of the most important characteristics of our present day society which must be given serious consideration is the astronomical speed with which it changes. No matter whether things develop in a positive or in a negative way, change itself constitutes a problem. Changes in scientific, technological, cultural, and social innovations are occurring at such an incredible pace that no one can really seem to keep abreast with them. Heylighen (1999) stated that the revolutionary new products of yesterday has become the common-place of today, and will become outdated in tomorrow's world. In this fast-paced society, people constantly need to revise and enhance their skills in order to keep up with and adapt to the changing circumstance. The notion of constant re-education can become very difficult to cope with.

Too much change will put a strain on people and the organization. Alvin Toffler (1970), known as a futurologist, conducted a detailed study of the acceleration of change and its psychological effects. His study suggested the acceleration of change would lead to a set of severe physical and psychological disturbances, which he termed the “future shock” syndrome. He further made the analogy, “Just like people exposed to war or disaster may develop a nervous breakdown (“shell-shock”), people exposed to the rapid changes of modern life may develop a state of helplessness and inadequacy” (p. 296).

In addition, according to researchers, there is indeed a positive correlation between change and illness. In 1967, psychiatrists, Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe examined the medical records of over 5,000 medical patients as a way to determine whether stressful events might cause illnesses. Using the “Life Change Scale,” which is a psychological tool to measure the amount of change experienced by a given person over a given time period, patients were asked to mark on the questionnaire a list of important changes they recently underwent: a new job, marriage, divorce, move to a new home, death of a family member, travel, promotion, ect. Patients were then asked to tally a list of 43 life events based on a relative score. A positive 0.1 correlation was found between their life events and their illnesses. Individuals with high life change scores were significantly more susceptible to falling ill. The study also revealed that illness correlates with all changes, positive (such as new job or marriage) as well as negative (such as loss of job or divorces). Their results were published as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), known more commonly as the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale.

Rahe carried out a study in 1970 testing the reliability of the stress scale as a predictor of illness. The scale was given to 2,500 U.S. sailors. They were asked to rate scores of

'life events' over the previous six months. Over the next six months, detailed records were kept of the sailors' health. There was a +0.118 correlation between stress scale scores and illness, which was sufficient to support the hypothesis of a link between life events and illness. In conjunction with the Cornell medical index assessing, the stress scale correlated with visits to medical dispensaries, and the H&R stress scale's scores also correlated independently with individuals dropping out of stressful underwater demolitions training due to medical problems. The scale was also assessed against different populations within the United States (with African, Hispanic and White American groups). The scale was also tested cross-culturally, comparing Japanese and Malaysian groups with American populations.

Heylighen (1999) believed that the way change actually affects our physical state is through its effect on our mental state. He asserted that the emotional reaction associated with change is arousal. This state of mind is a primarily neutral one which can develop either into a positive feeling, as when uniqueness brings about curiosity, excitement, and wonder, or into a negative one, as when a lack of clarity brings about confusion, tension, and fear. The longer such arousal is sustained, the more likely the interest will wear off and fatigue will set in (p. 2). If an individual does not find adequate measures to respond to normal stimuli, he or she will experience loss of control and distress.

The instinctive reaction of an animal to stressful situations falls into three main categories: fight, flight, or fright (Heylighen, 1999). The same inherited reactions seem to underlie our negative emotions. The "fight" reaction is associated with anger and aggression. "Flight" corresponds to fear and anxiety. "Fright" causes one to freeze in the face of uncontrollable danger.

Principals now face increased stress with the number and variety of problems they are confronted with. Once a very stable profession, the principalship is faced with unprecedented turnover. According to Barth (1990), disturbingly, the very best principals appeared to be the ones most likely to abandon their jobs (p. 65). The changing roles, demands, as well as realities of being a principal in an era of high-stakes accountability have much to do with the reason principals are leaving their positions. Interestingly enough, the U. S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) (1999) found similar evidence which suggests that stress is a major cause of turnover in organizations.

Structural Functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic-interaction theory are a few of the theories found in the sociological perspective. Of the three theories, the one that instructional leaders can identify with is the symbolic-interaction theory. The symbolic-interaction theory studies how social structures are created in the course of human interaction. It addresses the subjective meanings of human acts and the processes people use to develop and communicate shared meanings. Society is a network of interacting individuals, social structures, and groups (Collins, 1998).

Principals from the traditional school of thought have a difficult time with the symbolic-interaction theory because it requires them to change their way of thinking. Many of them are used to being the sole-decision maker in the school; therefore, they feel stress when they are asked to change their way of thinking. By changing relationships, principals are ultimately changing the symbolic meanings of their leadership (Collins, 1998).

Stress can also be looked at from another perspective, the psychological perspective. According to Newton (2002), psychological contracts can best be described as “sets of expectations, between individuals and the different sub-organizations to which they relate within the organization as a whole” (p. 192). In each school, the principal has a set of expectations for each person that works in the school. Oftentimes, the people that work in the organization also have a set of expectation for the principal. Some of them expect the principal to handle the discipline and not to handle curriculum. Instructional leaders may experience problems with resistance to changes that may be made when they start focusing on student achievement and comprehensive school reform. Because of this, instructional leaders, as well as teachers may feel the stress of change as they transition from the traditional role.

### Exemplary Leadership of High-Performing

#### *90/90/90 Schools*

90/90/90 schools is a term that was created in 1995 by Douglas Reeves. The term was coined after observations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. 90/90/90 schools are characterized when 90% or more of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, 90% or more of the students were members of ethnic minority groups, and 90% or more of the students met the district or state academic standards in reading or another area (Reeves, 2003). A common set of behaviors found in all 90/90/90 schools are: a) focus on academic achievement b) clear curriculum choices, c) frequent assessment of student progress and multiple opportunities for improvement, d) an emphasis on nonfiction writing and e) collaborative scoring of student work. These behaviors are exhibited in 90/90/90 schools



by the leaders and teachers in schools with “high achievement, high minority enrollment, and high poverty levels” (Reeves, 2003).

Research showed that instructional leaders and teachers in 90/90/90 schools have a strong focus on academic achievement. They rely on data to drive their curriculum choices. In 90/90/90 schools, instructional leaders used display data throughout their school. A person who visits a 90/90/90 school would often see data charts and graphs displayed. Instructional leaders would also have data displayed in their office. It is evident in these schools that student achievement is the most important aspect of the school. In these schools, the focus is not only on achievement, but it is also on improvement. Instructional leaders and teachers used the data to ensure that the students in their schools improve by at least a grade level as indicated on statewide assessments.

Research showed that instructional leaders and teachers in 90/90/90 schools have clear curriculum choices. Oftentimes, leaders and teachers chose “to emphasize the core skills of reading, writing, and mathematics in order to improve student opportunities for success in a wide variety of other academic endeavors later (Reeves, 2003, p. 4). The common mistake that other schools make is only focusing on reading, writing, and math. Schools that only focus on reading, math, and writing do not succeed in other areas, such as science. By focusing on all areas of the curriculum, 90/90/90 schools often outperform other schools in other assessment areas.

Instructional leaders and teachers in 90/90/90 schools frequently assessed and monitored student progress. 90/90/90 schools do not feel that students should be punished for low performance, but that they should be given multiple opportunities to succeed. Many instructional leaders and teachers in these schools assessed students using

classroom-based assessments on a weekly basis. “Research showed that when students are given “multiple opportunities to improve, the consequence is not however, the consequence for poor performance is not a bad grade and discouragement, but more work, improved performance, and respect for teacher feedback” (Reeves, p. 4).

Instructional leaders and teachers in 90/90/90 schools emphasized the importance of nonfiction writing. In 90/90/90 schools, teachers do this by requiring written responses on performance based assessments. Research indicated that “the use of written responses appears to help teachers obtain better diagnostic information about students, and certainly helps students demonstrate the thinking process that they employed to find a correct (or even an incorrect) response to an academic challenge” (Reeves, p. 5). As a result, scores in 90/90/90 schools are significantly higher on creative writing than on informative and narrative writing scores.

The final characteristic of 90/90/90 schools is the use of collaboration in scoring student work. Research showed that instructional leaders and teachers “developed common assessment practices and reinforced those common practices through regular exchanges of student papers” (Reeves, p. 6). Teachers in 90/90/90 schools would exchange papers with other teachers, principals would exchange papers with other principals, and finally, principals would take the responsibility in evaluating student work. By using collaboration in scoring student work, reliability improved, but little evidence was shown on student achievement.

90/90/90 schools continue to show signs of improvement in all areas. The instructional leaders in these schools focus on student achievement and display a sense of shared leadership among the employees. Additionally, every adult in the system, including bus

drivers, cafeteria workers, and janitors are valued and respected. In addition to being valued and respected, every adult in 90/90/90 schools is involved in professional development opportunities in classroom management and behaviors. According to Reeves, instructional leaders who commit their systems to consistency in the education and behavior of adults, ensure that every adult leader, from the bus driver to the food service employee to the classroom teacher is regarded as a significant adult leader in the eyes of students (p.12-13). More importantly, instructional leaders in 90/90/90 schools were personally involved in the evaluation of student work. Research indicated that the instructional leaders in these schools met regularly with parents and students to discuss student achievement, personally administered monthly assessments in language and math, provided additional time for collaborative scoring of student work, and encouraged teachers to display proficient and exemplary student work (Reeves, p. 14).

#### *Alabama Torchbearer Schools*

In December 2004, the Alabama State Department of Education conducted a book study. The book that was chosen was *No Excuses: 21 Lessons for High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* by Samuel Casey-Carter. The book that was studied had information about raising achievement level in high-performing, high-poverty schools. The study recognized twenty-one schools, none of which were located in Alabama. As a result of this book study, the Alabama Torchbearer schools were created “to recognize high-poverty, high-performing public schools in Alabama” (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2004-2005, p. V). In order for schools to be recognized in this program, they must have met the three following criteria: a) at least 70% of the student population

receiving free reduced meals, b) scored above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in all subjects at all grade levels on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-10) or the Alabama High School Graduation Exam (AHSGE), and c) have at least 66% of their students scoring at Level 3 or Level 4 on the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). Each of the Torchbearer Schools that have been recognized in the state of Alabama has many shared characteristics, including visionary leadership, and above all, a belief that their students can achieve.

Visionary leadership is a reason why Torchbearer Schools are successful. In Torchbearer schools, visionary leaders have “the freedom to make instructional decisions in their schools” (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2004-2005, p. 1). Instructional leaders in the Torchbearer schools have the “autonomy that allows them to address student achievement issues specific to their school” (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2004-2005, p. 1). They used this autonomy, along with shared leadership in order to ensure that student achievement decisions are influenced by the people with the most influence, which are the teachers (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2004-2005). More importantly, instructional leaders in Torchbearer schools are not afraid to communicate the goals of the schools with all stakeholders - including teachers. This type of leadership found in the Torchbearer schools is the type of leadership that comprehensive school reform is looking for in its instructional leaders.

“Chief Learning Officer,” “Dynamo,” and “Stern grandmotherly type who loves everyone implicitly, but does not put up with anything that might hurt her kids” (Alabama Leadership Academy, 2004-2005, p. 3) are just some of the terms that are used to describe principals in the Torchbearer Schools. Although each of the instructional

leaders that led the Torchbearer schools are different, they all have something in common, which is the effective way in which they led their schools. They all led their school's faculty and staff with openness, honesty, and dignity. At any time during the day, one may see the instructional leader teaching students or faculty new things that they have learned, visiting classrooms, or teaching lessons to students in the classroom. They would do anything to ensure that their students achieve, which is the ultimate test of an instructional leader.

### *Blue Ribbon Schools*

The Blue Ribbon School award was founded in 1982 by the Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell. The Blue Ribbon School Award was created to honor schools that exemplified excellence and equity. The Blue Ribbon School award had three purposes: a) it identified and recognized outstanding public and private schools across the nation, b) the program made research-based effectiveness criteria available to all schools so they could assess themselves and plan improvements, and c) the program encouraged schools, both within and among themselves, to share information about best practices based on a common understanding of criteria related to educational success (Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, 2006). Schools that were awarded Blue Ribbon Status, "demonstrated a strong commitment to educational excellence for all students" (Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, 2006). The criteria that were used in selecting the Blue Ribbon Schools were as follows: a) student focus and support, b) school organization and culture, c) challenging standards and curriculum, d) leadership and educational vitality, e) school, family, and community partnerships, and f) indicators of success.

Sandra Harris (2007) asked thirty-five principals of Blue Ribbon Schools what they considered their best leadership practices were in leading their schools. Many of the responses that were given fell into the following categories: a) leadership, b) shaping campus culture, c) collaborating and communicating, d) effective instructional programs, e) school improvement planning, and f) at-risk programs (Harris, p. 18). Of all of the categories listed, leadership is the most vital to the success of the Blue Ribbon Schools.

In *The Best from the Best: Effective Strategies of Award-Winning Principals* by Sandra Harris, instructional leaders offered “best practices that emphasized the importance of shared and purposeful leadership” (p. 18). Effective leaders in Blue Ribbon Schools ensure that their schools are successful by fostering a culture where everyone feels welcomed. This is accomplished by supporting student learning and collaborating with teachers. Another best practice that was shared by instructional leaders was the importance of collaboration and communication. Many of the principals in the Blue Ribbon schools communicated with their faculty and staff by using a “variety of school publications, including weekly and monthly newsletters, brochures, websites, and press releases to public newspapers” (Harris, p. 18). This is an effective task because it keeps the lines of communication open for all stakeholders. According to Harris, “effective leadership fosters a school improvement by establishing a culture of inquiry” (p.19). Inquiry learning is one of the most effective ways to improve student achievement. It allows teachers to improve student achievement by focusing on student data, as well as keeping abreast of the latest research (via book studies). Instructional leaders who utilize this strategy in their school find that it is an effective way to improve student achievement.

## Principal Perspectives of Leading in an Era of High Stakes Accountability

Accountability is a major part of the No Child Left Behind Act. School systems everywhere are expected to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). When school systems do not make adequate yearly progress, they face scrutiny from their local school board, the media, and ultimately the parents. Schools who do not make adequate yearly progress also risk losing students due to school choice. How do principals handle all of this stress while trying to ensure that their schools make adequate yearly progress?

Some believe that the classroom teacher has a huge impact on student learning. Others believe that it is the principal, not the classroom teacher, who ultimately impacts student achievement in their schools. According to Smylie & Hart (1999), “principals have substantial influence on the development, nature and function of teacher social relations, teacher learning, and change” (p. 421). In order for principals to be successful in the high stakes era, they must restructure their school organization, culture, and leadership style. Principals who are not instructional leaders may find this a difficult task due to various reasons. One of the reasons this may be difficult is because principals are often faced with directives from the Central Office which may not be clear. Oftentimes, principals have the false assumption that they can lead their schools by site-management, but they are held accountable to State and district mandates.

Another reason that it is difficult to be successful in the high-stakes era is the lack of understanding of comprehensive school reform. Although comprehensive school reform requires a lot of the principal’s time, dedication, and a shift in one’s paradigm, many principals do not understand this approach to leadership (Elmore, Ableman & Fuhrman,

1996). Effective leaders not only understand what is required of them in comprehensive school reform, they find ways to implement it in order to improve student achievement. A third reason why principals find it difficult to succeed in the high stakes era is curricular changes. States often find ways to tweak their curriculum, which requires principals to stay abreast of the changes as well as to ensure that their faculty stays abreast of the changes. Whenever the curriculum changes, principals have to require that their teachers participate in professional development. The problem arises when there is a State mandate with little to no funding.

All of these things make it very difficult for principals to succeed in this age of high-stakes accountability. Given the challenges of high-stakes assessment, principals have to find ways to improve student achievement while maintaining a positive school climate. Principals who are not instructional leaders will have a hard time accomplishing this task. In order to ensure that schools are successful in the age of high-stakes accountability, instructional leaders have to step forward.

### Summary

The review of the literature provided a contextual framework for this study by presenting the theories and relevant research that supports it. Leadership of school reform and change in an era of high-stakes accountability is a political hot topic. In today's school environment, principals' responsibilities have increased significantly to include the accountability for the success of all students as well as responsibility for "total" school operations.



Historical perspectives of school reform movements indicated that school reform movements are not new to education, but instead have been a part of schools for some time. As the public school movement proliferated in the United States, the federal government has taken more interest and provided more curricular guidelines and programs. It is important to note that every era of deep social change in U.S. history has produced incessant calls for social improvement through the reform of the public schools.

Education was a concern and focus of early settlers and the founding fathers in writing of the Constitution precisely because our democracy is dependent on an educated public (Paige, 2004). Recognizing the universal importance of education, the federal government assumed a larger role in financing public schools with the passage of the (ESEA) Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. This larger role of the federal government leads the nation's school into the Era of NCLB.

In January 2002, the principles of NCLB were incorporated into the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The reauthorized ESEA redefined the federal role in K-12 education and was expected to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) introduced the most sweeping and far reaching legislation in the history of However, the law placed the principal's at the center of accountability. Principals are now held accountable for total school performance based on a single indicator of student achievement test scores.

NCLB accountability has direct implications for schools and principals. Schools that meet AYP goals will be classified as "performing schools," while those that do not will be classified as "failing schools." Principal effectiveness is judged in much the same

manner. Principals that do not meet AYP, face sanctions and are subject to removal, while those that meet AYP receive lofty rewards. The federal government, along with local states has developed lofty reward systems for those schools and school districts that meet AYP.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

To study what meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and in experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability, a qualitative approach was used. It is appropriate to use qualitative methods for this study because the researcher plans to conduct the study in naturalistic settings and is interested in uncovering and understanding the perspectives and actual lived experiences of principals. Support for using this paradigm was offered by Maxwell (2005), who stated that, “The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 22). Selection of a research approach is an important decision made by the researcher. The objective of this decision is to select the approach that offers the “best fit” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 17) for the study being conducted. Determining which research approach to use to conduct a study is influenced by several factors. The researcher conceptualizes the study using a particular set of “assumptions about the world,” the topic selected for study, and “methodological preferences” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 37). She or he then looks for the approach that will provide the best match or “best fit” that will guide decisions regarding research design, data collection, reporting, and ultimately answering the research questions (Maxwell, p. 36).

## Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design

The researcher in this study used qualitative discourse. This approach enabled the researcher to explore and gather rich descriptions of principals' leadership roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability from the participants' perspective, using data collected directly from the participants through in-depth interviews, observations, and artifact collection. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior. Qualitative research investigates the reasons behind various aspects of behavior. Qualitative research has the goal of understanding a social or human problem from multiple perspectives. It is conducted in a natural setting and involves a process of building a descriptive detailed picture of the phenomenon of interest. A qualitative study will further allow the researcher to choose participants through purposeful sampling, selecting those who possess in-depth knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon.

Selection of this type of inquiry and research method was guided by several factors: 1) the researcher was only able to find limited information that examined the lived leadership experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability; 2) the researcher was unable to find any qualitative studies undertaken in Alabama that focused on the lived leadership experiences of principals in an era of high-stakes accountability; 3) the researcher was guided by the research topic, the purpose of the study, and the research questions in selecting a qualitative approach as the best fit for the study.

## Philosophical Paradigm

The researcher approached the study from a constructive paradigm. Constructivism is based upon the philosophical position that multiple social realities exist (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002). It operates on the premise that individuals create their own realities from the perspectives of their own unique experiences. The role of the constructivist researcher is to uncover the hidden meanings in social interaction. Therefore, the researcher and subjects must work together to construct the truth of their experiences. Constructivist research focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of a given phenomenon from an insider's perspective. As Hatch (2002) pointed out, while members of a social group may share common experiences and perceptions, each individual holds a unique perspective shaped by personal experiences. Research that draws upon the constructivist paradigm requires the investigator to examine the lived experiences of the research participants. Because of the nature of the researcher's familiarity with the phenomenon, the researcher cannot be totally objective and removed in the process but instead must be willing to work with participants to construct meaning of their own realities, setting aside their own biases.

The researcher should have knowledge of and a linkage to the phenomenon (epistemology). I am a veteran school principal with 18 years experience in public education. I have held the positions of teacher/ coach, assistant principal, elementary, middle and high school principal, and central office administrator. Every school that I have been employed as the principal faced State or Federal sanctions upon my entry. I have experienced the "thrills of victory and the agonies of defeat" of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Within the last seven years, I have been navigating the waters of the

NCLB as a middle school principal. During that time, I found myself faced with the challenges and mandates of leading and guiding the school I led through Title I School-wide Improvement. I became keenly aware of the complexity and ambiguity of the role of principal and how it has grown and the focus shifted from management and supervision to one of instructional leadership and building capacity for shared leadership and implementing second order change.

The researcher recognizes that research is value-laden and that personal biases are presented (axiological). The researcher acknowledges that the stories voiced are a reflection of his interpretation and presentation of his position as well as the subjects for this study. It is important in this process that the researcher does not make content-based judgments. The goal of this study is to provide more specific information about the phenomenon of what it is like to be a principal in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. For this study, the researcher will employ an emergent design. The focus of this qualitative study was to reduce the phenomenon of what it is like to be a principal in Alabama, in an era of high-stakes accountability to a description of the essence of the experience.

### Theoretical Framework

Theories provide an explanation, a predication, and a generalization about how the world operates (Creswell, 1998). “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human behavior” (Creswell, p. 37, 2007).

In this qualitative study, the researcher operated from a framework of generalizing what meaning do principals in the world make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. The researcher explored the administrative roles and experiences of 10 principals in Alabama, in an era of high-stakes accountability.

### Population and Study Sample

#### *Site Description*

Selection of sites for this study was guided by the principals selected for his study. For the purpose of this study, 10 schools, representing 10 school districts across the State of Alabama was selected. Both county and city school systems were represented. The school systems ranged in size from 1,400 to 37,000 students. Some districts also served multiple demographic areas. The schools in this study were rural, urban, or suburban. The median income of families living in a given were from \$26,665.00 to \$77, 737.00. Adults living within a given area, who possessed a high school diploma, ranged from 73.2%, while those who had a Bachelor of Science Degree range from 9.5% - 52.9%. Three elementary, 3 middle, and 4 high schools comprised this study. The smallest school represented in this study had a student population of 358 students. The largest school represented had a school population of 2063. The racial demographics of across student populations were either predominantly white or predominantly black, with some schools having a higher number of other ethnic groups represented, i.e. Hispanic, Asian/ Pacific Islanders, or American Indian/ Alaskan. Four of the sites were Title I school while six were not. Eight of the 10 schools made AYP the previous year. The two schools that did

not make AYP were both high schools. The following section provides a detailed description of the sites across Alabama which were included in this study.

*Site I.* This school is a part of a large urban school district located in Central Alabama. The current enrollment of the school system is estimated at 28,000. The school system currently has 60 schools, 7 high schools, 13 middle schools, 32 elementary schools, and 8 K-8 schools. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This middle school is located in Northeast section of the city which serves students in grades 6-8. The median income of families living in this area is \$33, 536.00. 84.9% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 23.8% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 445. The population is comprised of 86.9% African Americans, 2.1% Caucasians, 10.5% Hispanics, 0.2% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and 0.2% American Indian/ Alaska natives. The school receives Title I funding. Approximately 80% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 51 faculty and staff members. In addition, the school has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP.

*Site II.* This school is a part of a swiftly growing county school district which serves both suburban and rural areas located in South Alabama. The Board of Education currently serves an estimated 27,000 students within its perimeters. The school system currently has 45 schools, 9 high schools, 8 middle schools, 28 primary/ elementary schools. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.



This elementary school which opened its doors on the Eastern shoreline of the county in 2004 and serves students in grades K-5. The median income of families living in this area is \$65,975.00. 89.2% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 26.7% possess a Bachelor's Degree. Interestingly, the school has had only one principal since its inception. The school's current enrollment is 660. The population is comprised of 19.4% African Americans, 75.9% Caucasians, 3.4% Hispanics, 0.4% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and 0.2% American Indian/ Alaska natives. The school is not eligible to receive Title I funds. Only approximately 23.8% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 65 faculty and staff members and has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP. Further, the school has received numerous academic and attendance awards for their efforts.

*Site III.* This school is a part of a large county school district located in Central Alabama. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 37,000 students and services all areas which fall outside of the city boundaries. The school system currently has 53 schools, 14 high schools, 10 middle schools, 25 elementary schools, and 4 community schools. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This high school is located in Northeast section of the county which serves students in grades 7-12. The median income of families living in this area is \$46,239,00. 88.2% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 22.2% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 1,153. The population is comprised of 91.2% African Americans, 5.5% Caucasians, 2.8% Hispanics,

and 0.2% Asian/ Pacific Islanders. The school does not receive Title I funding. However, approximately 64.1% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 98 faculty and staff members and has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP. The school further has improved its status to school-wide improvement Year 2 (delay).

*Site IV.* This school is a part of a large suburban school district which encompasses parts of two counties located in north central Alabama. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 13,000 students, and is continuously experiencing yearly exponential growth. The school system currently has 15 schools, 2 high schools, 3 middle schools, 10 elementary schools. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This elementary school located is in north central section of the city which serves students in grades K-5. The median income of families living in this area is \$77,737,00. 96.2% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 52.9% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 612. The population is comprised of 26.7% African Americans, 60.0% Caucasians, 4.3% Hispanics, 4.3% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and 9.0% American Indian/ Alaska natives. The school does not receive Title I funding. Approximately 15.4% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 100 faculty and staff members. Further, it has consistently met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP. The school has received numerous awards and recognition for its academic achievement.

*Site V.* This school is a part of a small city school district in a rural area located in the “Blackbelt” region of Alabama, one of the most impoverished areas in the state and country. This area has, however, shown promise of the rural-urban continuum. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 4,000 students and boasts having one of its schools identified as a Torchbearer School, a distinction designated by the Alabama State Department of Education for high achieving schools with a majority economically disadvantaged students. The school system currently has 13 schools, 1 high school, 2 middle schools, 8 elementary schools, and 2 alternative schools. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This elementary school located just outside of downtown and serves students in grades K-5. The median income of families living in this area is \$26,665.00. 75.5% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 19.1% possess a Bachelor’s Degree. The school’s current enrollment is 358. The population of this school is a homogenous population of 100% African Americans. The school receives Title I funds. Approximately 90.9% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 42 faculty and staff members and has consistently met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP.

*Site VI.* This school is a part of a mid-size rural school district located in northeastern region of Alabama. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 8,152 students. The school system currently has 17 schools, 5 high schools, 1 middle school, 1 junior high school, 8 elementary schools, 1 alternative school, and 1 alternative school. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This high

school serves students in grades 7-12. The median income of families living in this area is \$46,451.00. 73.2% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 9.5% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 430. The population is comprised of 0.2% African American, 90.0% Caucasians, 8.1% Hispanics, 1.2% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and 0.2% American Indian. The school is not a Title I school. Approximately 30.9% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 50 faculty and staff members. The school had met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP in previous years, however, failed to make AYP in for the 2007-2008 academic school year.

*Site VII.* This school is a part of a small city school district with an urban fringe of a large city, yet classified as a rural area, located in northwest Alabama. The school system has been in existence for four years. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 1,400 students. The school system currently has 3 school, 1 high school, 1 middle school, 1 elementary school, and plans of expansion. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This high school serves students in grades 9-12. The median income of families living in this area is \$46,933.00. 85.2% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 21.4% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 420. The population is comprised of 34.2% African Americans, 61.9% Caucasians, and 4.0% Hispanics. The school is not eligible to receive Title I funding. Approximately 27% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 63

faculty and staff members. The school has failed to meet all state standards according to NCLB for two consecutive years and has been identified as being in school-wide improvement Year 1.

*Site VIII.* This school is a part of a mid-size urban city school district located in north Alabama along a major river. The school system serves over 8,700 students in 18 schools. The school system currently has 2 high schools, 3 middle schools, 12 elementary schools, and an alternative school. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This middle school serves students in grades 5-8. It further holds the honor of being one of only three middle schools in the State of Alabama to be distinguished as an International Baccalaureate School (IB). The median income of families living in this area is \$46,646, 00. 82.7% of the adults living within the area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 23.5% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 650. The population is comprised of 59.8% African Americans, 21.1% Caucasians, 59.8% Hispanics, and 0.4% Asian/ Pacific Islanders. The school is a Title I school with approximately 81% of the students classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 75 faculty and staff members and has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP.

*Site IX.* This school is a part of a mid-size suburban school district located in west central Alabama. The school systems' current enrollment is estimated at 9,800 students and continuously growing. The school system currently has 13 schools, 2 high schools, 2 K-12 schools, 1 junior high/ high school (7-12); 1 junior high school (7-8), 5 elementary

schools, 1 kindergarten school, and 1 alternative school. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This high school located in a charming New England-style village nestled cozily in the heart of the Deep South, which serves students in grade 9-12. The median income of families living in this area is \$57,353.00. 80.7% of the adults living within the area have at least a High School Diploma, while 18.4% possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 2063. The population is comprised of 19.7% African Americans, 75.1% Caucasians, 1.3% Hispanics, 1.4% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and 1.6% American Indian/ Alaska natives. Approximately 22.4% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch, therefore is not eligible to receive Title I funds. The school employs 108 faculty and staff members and has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP. The school further has established a reputation of excellence in athletics, winning numerous state titles in recent years.

*Site X.* This school is a part of a mid-size county school district located in northwest Alabama at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The school district serves the entire northwest county except the city school system. The current enrollment of the system is estimated at 8,300 students. The school system currently has 22 schools, 6 high schools, 8 elementary/ junior high (K-8) schools, 2 middle schools (5-8), 2 elementary schools (K-6), 2 elementary schools (K-4), 1 center of technology, and 1 alternative school. All schools are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This middle school is nestled near a lake and serves students in grades 5-8. The median income of families living in this area is \$36,470.00. 79.3% of the adults living within the

area have at-least a High School Diploma, while 6.2 % possess a Bachelor's Degree. The school's current enrollment is 447. The population is comprised of 0.5% African Americans, 99.0% Caucasians, and 0.5% Hispanics. The school is not classified as a Title I school, yet approximately 45% of the students are classified as economically disadvantaged and receive free or reduced lunch. The school employs 46 faculty and staff members and has met all state standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP.

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding and to construct meaning of the lived leadership experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants. With purposeful sampling, the researcher selected individuals and sites for study because they could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The researcher made a deliberate effort to select participants who could bring richness and depth to understanding the phenomenon of study. The researcher purposefully sent recruitment letters (Appendix B) to solicit selected participants for this study. The sample for this study consisted of 10 K-12 public school principals in the State of Alabama who met the established criteria of having served in the position of principal for a minimum of five years during the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Five men and 5 women served as participants for this study. Participants were predominantly African-American (60 %) while the other participants were Caucasian (40%). All participants minimally possessed a Masters Degree or Class A Certification equivalent in Educational Leadership. Fifty percent possessed an Educational Specialist Degree (Ed. S.) or Class AA Certification in

Educational Leadership. In addition, 30% of the participants possessed an earned Doctorate of Philosophy Degree (Ph. D.).

### Data Collections

Qualitative research focuses on learning the meaning participants hold about a problem or issue (Creswell, 2007). For this qualitative inquiry with symbolic interaction, 10 principals in the State of Alabama were studied as participants. Creswell (2007) recommended studying several individuals that have shared the experience. To ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the study as well as add to the richness and depth of the data, multiple data sources were used. The primary data collection methods that were used for this study were face-to-face in-depth interviews, with support from observations and artifacts collected at each site.

Over a time period, data was obtained primarily from three sources: (1) in-depth interviews conducted with each participant, (2) site observations, and (3) artifacts collected from each principal. Participants were provided an interview protocol several days before the interview. This allowed the participants to become familiar with the interview questions and an opportunity to construct meaningful responses. Each initial interview lasted between 45 - 75 minutes and was conducted in the school location where the principal was assigned. A total of 10 interviews were completed with follow up interviews occurring as necessary. Prior to beginning an interview with participants, the researcher reviewed the purpose and design of the study as well as discusses measures of maintaining participant confidentiality. The researcher obtained both a signed written consent and a completed *Participant Data Sheet* (Appendix D). The researcher used the



*Participant Data Sheet* to collect pertinent information about the participants' training, length of time at the school, and number of students enrolled. The researcher answered any questions related to the study, its design and the interview. Participants' confidentiality was assured and measures intended to protect participant data was described, including the researcher's intention to use pseudonyms in this study. A digital tape recorder was used to record all participant interviews.

The researcher used the interview protocol, which contained a set of open-ended questions to guide the interview process (Appendix E). The researcher remained open and flexible to asking probing questions for clarification to deepen understanding of the phenomenon when it seemed pertinent to the study. The researcher made notes about the interview using the interview protocol worksheet (Appendix F). At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher again reiterated the purpose and the design of the study and thanked the participants for their involvement in the study. To add contextual and supporting data to participant interviews, the researcher spent time observing and collecting artifacts from the school sites. Two-weeks following the completion of interviews and data collections, a \$10.00 gift card was mailed to participants in appreciation for their willingness and cooperation to participate in the study.

### Data Analysis

Creswell (2003) described data analysis in qualitative research as “the process of making sense out of text and image data” (p. 204). Creswell (2007) further espoused that data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing “the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing

the codes, finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 148). Hatch (2002) states, “Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p.148). Qualitative data analysis entails an inductive process, wherein researchers explore the data to identify themes and patterns and to formulate tentative hypotheses (Trochim, 2006).

In this qualitative study, the fact that the researcher may have shared with respondents certain experiences within the domain of proposed research objectives gives the possibility of heightened significance to data analysis and interpretation (Schulz, 1997) but this is managed or governed by the success with which a researcher both designs and applies procedures for the operation of bracketing. Morse & Richards (2002) described bracketing as setting aside ones personal theories, prior knowledge, and experiences with the phenomenon in order to accurately report and describe it precisely as it is perceived from the participants’ point of view. Bracketing, interchangeably is also referred to as, epoche. Epoche is defined by Moustakas (1994) “as a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p.33). In the Epoche, all prejudgments and understandings are set aside. This allows the researcher to analyze things in a new way, a way that requires them to be able to distinguish and describe the essence before their eyes. The challenge for the researcher is to allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically in coming to an understanding of what essentially the research respondents mean in their personal accounts expressed through the data collection devices. This placed upon me as the researcher, the obligation of separating any past knowledge or experience I might have had in working as a principal in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability but then to legitimize that experience by connecting it interpretatively to the meanings of the

respondents associated with this study. This process is described by Gearing (2004) as 'reintegration' (p.1434) which consists of "...the unbracketing and subsequent reinvestment of the bracketed data into the larger investigation" (p.1434). Gearing used the term 'unbracketing' (p.1434) to describe the event of removing the brackets which leads to a fusion between the researcher's past experiences and units of meaning. The idea expressed in this fusion or *unbracketing* emerges as the interpretative statement.

The researcher analyzed all data through bracketing, intuiting, and describing. In doing so, the researcher relied on the descriptive details given from the participants to describe what was real. After each encounter with a participant, audio files will be replayed and transcribed to identify emerging categories, themes, and patterns used to organize data.

In order to become immersed in the research data, it is recommended that the researcher read the transcripts several times (Creswell, 2007). The researcher began by describing and bracketing personal leadership experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability (Appendix G) in order to acknowledge personal bias and set it aside in the analysis of the data. After reading through the transcripts several times to become familiar with them, the researcher developed "a list of significant statements" (Moustakas, 1994) and attempted to uncover distinct, non-overlapping statements. Almost simultaneously with the collection and analyzation of data, an "analysis spiral" (Creswell, 2007) of describing, classifying, and interpreting occurred. The researcher used the QSR N6 Qualitative software (Appendix I) for the reduction of data using categorization and coding which made the interpretation of rich descriptions of the

perceptions of participants more manageable and able to be used as the basis for findings and conclusions.

### Verification Procedures

In order to develop a plan to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of its project, the researcher followed Creswell's (2007) recommendation of having at least three verification procedures. The following strategies were employed in this study to ensure the accuracy of the data analysis:

- Triangulation - More specifically, methodological triangulation were used. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), this procedure involves the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources to form themes or categories in a study. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts. The themes and experiences were be recorded and reflected in the three pieces of data collected.
- Peer debriefing - Peer debriefing is very worthwhile and pertinent in deciding how to interpret and use the findings of this study. Cooper (1997) defined peer debriefing as the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer to explore aspects of the inquiry that otherwise might remain implicit only in the inquirer's mind. The dissertation committee, doctoral candidate colleagues, and other professional colleagues served as peer reviewers. Ongoing feedback was solicited during this process.
- Member checking - According to Creswell (2007), member checking is a qualitative process during which the researcher asks one or more participants in

the study to check the accuracy of the account. By doing this, the researcher was able to ensure that all interpretations made were fair and representative of the essence being captured. In order to validate the interview data, each participant was given the opportunity to review the draft of the researcher's report.

### Ethical Considerations

In all qualitative research, protecting the research participants should be of paramount concern. The researcher has a responsibility of preventing harm to the participants. "The researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of the informant(s)" (Creswell, 2003, p. 201). The researcher also has a responsibility to protect the research process. The researcher took precautionary measures to address the ethical issues that commonly arise in qualitative research. The study was designed to eliminate as much as possible risk to participants by disclosing the purpose of the study, seeking voluntary participants, and assuring their confidentiality and anonymity. Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board (IRB), the school systems for which the participants were employed, and individual participants. The identity of the participants and their schools were concealed using pseudonyms and assigning Roman numerals to school sites. The researcher stored the audio-recordings and transcribed tapes in separate but secured locations accessible only by the researcher. Instead of using the actual names of the participants, field notes and audio files were labeled using pseudonyms. Artifacts collected were also labeled using the researcher's selected pseudonyms. All personal identifiers were known by the researcher. For the purpose of this phenomenological

study, member checking was used. Participants were allowed to view any and all information before it was shared with others. This allowed the participants to decide whether or not the information may be harmful to them. The researcher also discussed ways to disclose the information without threat to the participants. The participants were apprised that they will be informed if there were any concerns of breach of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the subjects in the final reporting of this study.

### Role of the Researcher

Maxwell (2005) asserted that in qualitative research, “the researcher is viewed as the instrument” (p. 83). The role that a researcher plays in qualitative research focuses on becoming “one” with the topic and handling every aspect of the investigation, while serving as the primary instrument in handling all observations, interviews, and data collection. The researcher in qualitative research spends substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, often with intense contact with participants observing everything. As Hatch (2002) stated “going native”, qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, which is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize the experiences and make sense of their worlds (Hatch, 2002). The interpersonal skills of the researcher are paramount to the success of a qualitative study.

## Summary

The researcher in this study used qualitative design to explore the in-depth, lived experience of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. Chapter 3 focused on the methodology and rationale for using qualitative inquiry and research design to explore the administrative roles and experiences of principals in an era of high-stakes accountability.

A total of 10 participants were selected as participants for this study. All participants were interviewed in-person. While conducting site observations, the researcher gathered artifacts from each site. Using open coding, themes and sub-themes were developed. Triangulation, peer debriefing, member checking were used as verification procedures. Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher were also described.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

The findings of this qualitative study represent the perspectives and perceptions of principals across the State of Alabama as to what meaning they make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. To fully explore the context of the principals' experiences, this study was guided by the following sub-questions to better understand the central phenomenon:

1. How do principals describe their roles in working in of an era high-stakes accountability?
2. How do principals operate daily in an era of high-stakes accountability?
3. How do principals develop their skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
4. How do principals adjust to and handle the unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities?
5. What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals' personal and professional lives?
6. What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
7. What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?



A total of 10 school districts, in 10 counties across the State, with 10 participants purposefully selected comprised this study. This chapter summary will concern itself with describing the participants selected from 10 schools, three (3) elementary schools, two (2) middle schools, and four (4) high schools (See Table 1); the results of the perceptions given by the participants in response to individual interview questions; a description of the artifacts collected and on site observations conducted in this multi-site study; and the results of meanings formulated from significant statements and phrases and themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected during the in depth interviews, artifact collections, and site observations.

### Context

The study took place with ten principals on campuses across the State of Alabama. Each principal selected had a minimum of five years experience as a principal in an era of high-stakes accountability. The principals in this study represented all school levels; elementary, middle, and high schools. The sites represented had varying demographics. The schools were either classified as rural, urban, or suburban. The number of adults living within an area with at-least a High School Diploma range from 73.2% to 96.2%, while the number of the adults who possessed a Bachelor's Degree range from 9.5% to 52.9%. The median income per household range from \$26,665.00 to \$77,737.00. The school populations range from 358 students to 2063 students. The student populations were very diverse. Student populations range from being predominantly black to being predominantly white, while others were more balanced. Four schools were classified as Title I schools while the remaining six were not. Eight of the schools met all state

standards according to NCLB and achieved 100% AYP. Two schools, both high schools, failed to make AYP the previous year.

### Participants

All participants in the study were employed as public school principals in the State of Alabama. Their ages ranged from 37 years of age to 59 years of age. The participants' length of teaching and administrative experience was varied. The participant with the least number of years spent as a teacher had taught for 3 years before becoming an interim high school principal. Two participants had taught for more than 20 years before becoming an administrator. As teachers, 5 had taught middle school or high school, 3 had taught elementary school, and 2 had taught special education K-12.

A wide range of time serving as a school principal existed among the participants. The range for total years as a principal was 5 years to 23 years. Four participants had been principals in at least one other location. One participant had only served as principal of their current school. The timeframe in which the principals had been at their current school sites range from 2 years to 18 years.

Three elementary school principals, 3 middle school principals, and 4 high school principals comprised this study. The grade configuration of the elementary schools was consistent with all of them serving grades K-5. On the contrary, the grade configurations for middle schools and high schools differed in context. Two middle schools served grades 6-8, while one served grades 5-8. On the high school level, 3 of the schools served grades 9-12, while the other had students in grades 7-12.

Elizabeth is a 52 year old Caucasian white female. She currently holds an Ed. S. in educational leadership. Elizabeth had 30 years of educational experience, with 5 years in educational administration. Elizabeth had spent the majority of her career in a rural school setting. Elizabeth served as a special education K-12 teacher prior to becoming an administrator. All of her experience as a school principal has been at her current school. She enjoys reading, swimming, watching classical movies, photography, and spending time with her grandchildren.

Lewis is a 37 year old Caucasian male. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. Degree in Educational Leadership. Lewis had 11 years of educational experience, with 8 years in educational administration. Lewis had spent the majority of his educational career in either an urban or suburban school setting. Lewis has served as strength and conditioning coach for a college football program, a high school physical education teacher and coach, and a high school assistant principal prior to becoming a principal. He is in his fourth year as a principal at his current school. Lewis is married with two children. He enjoys spending time with his family and being active in the community. Lewis further has aspirations of becoming a school superintendent one day.

Sharon is a 37 year old Black female. She recently completed her Ph.D. Degree in Educational Leadership. Sharon had 14 years of educational experience, with 8 years in educational administration. She taught secondary Language Arts at an alternative school as well as at the high school level. Sharon further had experience as a middle school assistant principal and as an elementary and middle school principal. She is in her second year as a principal at her current school. Sharon grew up in the inner city and enjoys

reading and dancing. Sharon has aspirations of becoming a Chief Curriculum Officer for a school district.

Jean is a 55 year old Black female. She holds a Masters Degree in Special Education and a Class A certification in school administration. Jean had 31 years of educational experience, with 10 years in educational administration. Jean had spent the majority of her educational career in rural school settings. She had experience as an elementary school teacher, middle school assistant principal, high school assistant principal, and elementary school principal. Jean is in her sixth year as a principal at her current school. She grew up in a rural setting and enjoys spending quality time with her family. Jean indicated that she is interested in returning to the high school level as principal.

Diane is a 58 year old Caucasian female. She has a Ph.D. Degree in Educational Leadership. She holds the dubious distinction of having spent more than half of her career as an administrator. Diane had 36 years of educational experience, with 18 years in educational administration. Diane had spent the majority of her educational career in a suburban school setting. She taught on the elementary level and spent three years as an administrative intern prior to becoming an educational administrator. She is in her 17<sup>th</sup> year as a principal at her current school. Diane loves the educational arena and is married to a career educator as well. After a stellar career and productive career in education, Diane has begun to look towards retirement.

Toni is a 57 year old Black female. She had obtained a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership. She also holds the dubious distinction of having spent more than half of her career as an administrator. Toni had 36 years of educational experience, with

19 years in educational administration. Toni had spent the majority of her educational career in urban and suburban school setting. She had taught almost every grade on the elementary school level. She is in her fifth year as a principal at her current school. Toni grew up in a rural setting. She is married and now relishes in the opportunity of being a grandmother. She also enjoys playing tennis and reading. Toni loves the principalship and has no immediate plans of changing positions or careers.

Brian is a 49 year old Black male. He had obtained AA certification (almost the equivalent of an Ed. S. Degree) in Educational Leadership. Brian had 26 years of educational experience, with 23 years in educational administration. Brian has spent his entire educational career in an urban school setting. He has garnered a reputation of being a “Super Principal” within his school district. Brian had taught social studies and coached on the high school level, served as an interim high school principal, and served as principal at 4 other schools. Brian is in his fourth year as a principal at his current school. Brian grew up in a suburban area. He is an avid sportsman and enjoys golfing. He was sent to his current school because of the plight of urban schools.

Drew is a 48 year old Black male. He had obtained AA certification (almost the equivalent of an Ed. S. Degree) in Educational Leadership. Drew had 27 years of educational experience, with 14 years in educational administration. Drew has spent his entire educational career in an urban school setting. He had taught physical education and social studies at the Jr. High and High School level. Drew also coached on the high school level. He served as a high school assistant principal prior to becoming a principal. Drew is in his second year as a principal at his current school. Drew is the product of an urban area. He enjoys reading, watching sports, and working outside.

Barry is a 46 year old Black male. He had obtained his Ph. D. in Educational Leadership. Barry had 15 years of educational experience, with 11 years in educational administration. Barry entered the education profession as a result of changing careers. Barry had taught Special Education/ Collaborative grades 7-12 for 4 years and served as assistant principal prior to becoming principal. Barry is in his ninth year as principal there. Barry grew up in an urban area. He finds working out to be very relaxing.

Don is a 53 year old Caucasian male. He had obtained an AA Certification (almost the equivalent of an Ed. S. Degree) in Educational Leadership. Don had 30 years of educational experience, with 20 years in educational administration. Don has spent his entire educational career in a rural school setting. Don had taught physical education, social studies and coached on the high school level. He served as a high school assistant principal prior to becoming a principal. Don is in his ninth year as a principal at his current school. He is very active in the Council of Leaders in Alabama Schools (CLAS). Don is the product of a rural area. He is an avid sportsman and enjoys golfing. He further enjoys spending time with his family.

Table 1. – Participant Summary Data

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Highest Degree</b>	<b>Education Experience</b>	<b>Administrative Experience</b>	<b>School Setting</b>	<b>Median Family Income</b>	<b>School Configuration</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>
Barry	Black	Male	46	Ph. D.	15	11	Urban	\$46,646.00	5-8 Middle School	650
Brian	Black	Male	49	AA Certification	26	23	Urban	\$46,239.00	7-12 High School	1,153
Diane	Caucasian	Female	58	Ph. D.	36	18	Suburban	\$77,737.00	K-5 Elementary	612
Don	Caucasian	Male	53	AA Certification	30	20	Rural	\$36,470.00	6-8 Middle School	447
Drew	Black	Male	48	AA Certification	27	14	Urban	\$46,933.00	9-12 High School	420
Elizabeth	Caucasian	Female	52	Ed. S.	30	5	Rural	\$46,451.00	7-12 High School	430
Jean	Black	Female	55	M. Ed.	31	10	Rural	\$26,665.00	K-5 Elementary School	358
Lewis	Caucasian	Male	37	Ed. S.	11	5	Suburban	\$57,353.00	9-12 High School	2063
Sharon	African American	Female	37	Ph. D.	15	8	Urban	\$33,536.00	6-8 Middle School	445
Toni	African American	Female	57	M. Ed.	36	19	Suburban	\$65,975.00	K-5 Elementary	660

## Themes

Creswell (2003) described data analysis in qualitative research as “the process of making sense out of text and image data” (p. 204). The process relies on building data from the first and second research questions, then the researcher will go through the data (e.g., interview transcriptions, site observations, and artifacts), highlighting “significant statements,” sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Moustakus (1994) called this step in the process horizontalization. The next step in the process requires the researcher to develop clusters of meaning from the significant statements into themes. Data were collected from 10 principals using interviews, site observations, and artifacts. After analyzing all of the data collected, five themes and 21 sub-themes emerged. The five major themes that emerged were administrative roles and responsibilities, collaborative/ shared leadership, relentless commitment to student success, professional growth and development, and demands of the principalship. They are shown with their sub-themes in Table 2.

### *Administrative Roles and Responsibilities*

In this era of accountability and high-stakes testing, raising achievement scores is just one of the challenges confronting today's school principals. The theme of administrative roles and responsibilities emerged from all participants. Faced with a myriad of complex administrative roles and responsibilities, principals are confronted daily with competing demands of multiple instructional priorities and insurmountable administrative task. All of the participants address the totality of the position. Barry eagerly stated, “You have to wear many hats being a principal.” Brian validated this statement by stating, “I am



responsible for almost everything that takes place here.” Jean, in a more colorful and joking way described her roles and responsibilities by saying,

I am the lawyer, doctor, Indian chief, and everything that goes with it.  
I am the instructional leader. I’m professional development. I’m the custodian. I’m parent-involvement. I manage the office. I do it all. I’m a little of everything.

Her explanation seemed to capture the colossal essence of the job. Diane further added, “I feel like my School Board holds me accountable for everything.”

While recognizing the multi-faceted and multiple responsibilities of the principalship, the widespread demand of NCLB to improve student performance has really focused the principals on instructional leadership and testing mandates. Instructional leadership was identified as the central focus of every participants’ responsibilities. When speaking of their role as the instructional leader, the participants’ demeanors and responses became very emphatic and direct. This was best illustrated in Toni’s explanation of her primary responsibility as principal in an era of high-stakes accountability. She stated,

I am being looked at as the instructional leader first. ....Being there to make sure what things need to be addressed in the classroom, in the school as far as instruction is concerned....I would consider myself the instructional leader, making sure we are implementing the various programs we have in the system.

Being an instructional leader encompasses numerous responsibilities in managing a school’s instructional program. Principals are expected to provide professional development and support to faculty and staff members; monitor instruction and student achievement; evaluate teachers effectiveness; and be held accountable for testing mandates. Typically, participants spoke in generality when speaking of their roles as an instructional leader. Each participant went down a list of task domains associated with being an instructional leader. Common responses provided by participants included:

spending time monitoring teaching and instruction; providing quality staff development and support for teachers; using data to monitor student academic achievement; communicating effectively; evaluating teacher performance; a host of other administrative responsibilities. An example of this was provided in Barry's response. He stated,

Principals are required to monitor teaching and instruction. We have data meetings. We have to look at student achievement data on a monthly basis, monitor their progress,.....make sure they are going to be prepared for the test. We evaluate teachers to make sure they are actually meeting the philosophy of our school and school district in terms of teaching. ....It's an on-going process that's very, very intense and difficult.

Sharon gave a similar portrayal of her role as an instructional leader. She described her role in this way:

My role in the era of high-stakes accountability is..... to ensure that the instructional process is at its best. ....Monitoring teachers to ensure they are providing quality instruction. To ensure that kids are learning and getting prepared to take the test, even though we are not teaching for the test ....but we need to be sure that they are prepared.

Elizabeth further explained her understanding of her role by saying, "My understanding is that the principal should be the instructional leader, ensuring that standards are being covered, the course of study is being covered, and that we are making progress. The role of instructional leader has significantly expanded the responsibilities of the principal."

Toni acknowledges this fact by stating,

I am doing a lot of observations in the classroom, making sure they are covering what they need to cover as far as our pacing guides, making sure they are completing whatever they have to complete in a certain time, so they will be prepared for the standardized test.

While the primary focus of the participants is placed on the instructional leadership responsibilities, the day-to-day management responsibilities are still very much a part of

principals' roles and responsibilities. In 6 out of 10 participants, their perceptions of their management responsibilities were evident in their response. Lewis' description of his management responsibilities best exemplify participants' responses. He stated,

I deal with any problems that arise on a day to day basis. I deal with management things and make sure the facilities are top notch as well. I make sure the day to day operations for the students is a safe one. I spend a lot of the time dealing with neighborhood drama, because I believe prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Four out of 10 principals ranked safety and security among its most important responsibilities. Sharon in expounding on her role as instructional leader stated, "My primary tasks are to make sure learning is taking place in a safe environment." As another example, Brian explained, "We were classified as a violent and dangerous school. I have to make safety a priority." The vision of schools being safe and supporting learning is very powerful. As well as ensuring academic success, principals have the responsibility of ensuring a positive and orderly school environment.

#### *Collaborative/ Shared Leadership*

The second theme that emerged from this study was collaboration/shared leadership. Collaborative, shared leadership among students, faculty, and staff fosters school environments that promote student success. In addition, it appears that as a result of unprecedented educational reform and accountability, collaboration has become a very significant component in addressing the high demands placed on the principalship in an era of high-stakes accountability. Diane's statement summarizes this view,

I think that accountability has given us more purpose. It helps us to sharpen the saw a little bit. While we have always done that since we've been here, we have tried to be as collaborative as possible.

Delegation of responsibilities to others, e.g., assistant principals, lead teachers, guidance counselors, curriculum support teachers, was a response commonly given by participants as a measure of addressing their massive roles. Barry explains that,

I delegate a lot of responsibility to lead teachers.....My AP's handle a lot of the disciplinary issues. (Pause)...I let them handle all of the scheduling and stuff like that. They further assist me with instructional things.

Elizabeth's response to the delegation of responsibilities was almost the same. She provided this response, "I try to make sure that I delegate what I can delegate to other people, especially teacher leaders at our schools. I try to delegate some responsibilities". Delegating leadership to others demonstrates willingness on behalf of the principal to build capacity in others.

Teaming was another form of collaborative, shared leadership that was evident and practiced by most of the principals. The majority of them boldly spoke of having teams to get their jobs done. The best response which illustrated the teaming concept was provided by Jean. In realizing all of the demands being placed on the principal, Jean stated, "I have to realize that I can't do all these tasks by myself so I have organized leadership teams to get things done."

Further acknowledging the high demands of the principalship and demonstrating her commitment to teaming, Diane added the most assertive statement relative to this function. In regards to teaming, she presents this as a non-negotiable, by stating, "That is one of our major focuses here. Everyone is required to be on a team at least one team."

As a result of organizing leadership teams, Lewis explained, "I think it is important that we (the team) have a shared vision. It is the only way we are going to meet the mandates of NCLB." The discipline of shared vision focuses on what thoughts and

concepts managers share with their teams to get goals accomplished. Barry's statement clearly illustrates creating a shared vision.

Once everyone understands that our purpose is for kids, without the kids we wouldn't be here, then we can work. I start there then we try to work together as a unit. I believe in shared leadership.

Effective, collaborative/ shared leadership requires open communication. As a school principal, one is required to work with many people, especially the administrative and support staff. All participants described a process of open communication and a close working relationship with the assistant principals and support staffs. This practice of open communication is best captured in statements provided by Don, "My assistant principal and I work as a team. We collaborate on a daily basis, to figure out things for the teachers." Further emphasizing the importance of open communication with his assistant principal, Drew stated, "One thing I am going to do is meet with my assistant principal before school starts every day." The participants' responses demonstrated a commitment, almost a necessity of having open communication and a working relationship with their assistants and support staff. All of participants had an extremely clear understanding of the myriad of functions and complexities of the principalship. With the staggering array of responsibilities in an era of high-stakes accountability, principals are turning to a more collaborative model of leadership to support total school achievement.

### *Relentless Commitment to Student Success*

The third theme to emerge in this study was relentless commitment to student success. Heart, passion, and conviction are the best descriptors of this theme. Relentless commitment to students' success is vital in promoting quality schools and high student

achievement. Leaders who demonstrate this attribute possess an unwavering resolve about student achievement and are accepting of the accountability and demands that come with the principalship. They accept responsibility for raising the student achievement of all students. All participants communicated a commitment and determination about student success. Drew's statement provided a clear illustration of relentless commitment and unwavering resolve about student achievement. He stated,

My goal is to keep my school out front, be a major leader, a drum major for education, to be a drum major for my kids and for my school. Too many principals have been building leaders and not really instructional leaders.

Sharon's statement further personifies this unwavering resolve. She stated,

Visiting other schools, both similar and different, even though we are an urban school, we don't make any excuses. Taking into consideration of being an urban school, we don't have extra resources and extra people, we don't use that as an excuse."

Barry added,

I have to constantly try to encourage and promote people to do the right thing, and also promote and encourage kids, to motivate them to do their best, and perform their best not only on high-stakes testing, but on daily assignments as well.

Participants' clearly communicated commitment and high expectations for students' academic achievement and success.

A large part of principals working in an era of high-stakes accountability is their willingness to accept total accountability for what happens in their school. Participants' responses exhibited a clear illustration of their willingness to be accountable. Toni stated, "Well... I like the idea of having teachers and administrators being held accountable for what is being taught and learned." Drew's statement further supported willingness to being held accountable. He added, "We need to be held responsible, because if we are not held responsible then there is no accountability held on any level."

All of the participants felt that the best way to ensure students' success was by visiting the classroom and monitoring instruction. Don's statement best illustrated a commitment to monitoring instruction. He stated, "I observe classes every day, have grade level meetings, and look at data trying to figure out how to move the child to the next level." Stating a similar position, Brian added, "You must have a commitment to inspect what you expect." Drew further supported the function of monitoring instruction by adding, "I try to get into one class every period and sometimes more than that. Only if it's for 5 minutes, I am going to be visible in the classroom, so teachers know what I expect from them and also they know they have my support."

#### *Professional Growth and Development*

The fourth theme to emerge was professional growth and development. Recognizing the fact that the principalship is one of the most difficult jobs in the nation, on-going professional growth and development is needed to help them meet the challenges and demands of their position. All participants agreed that professional growth and development is the key to being successful and effectively leading their staffs in an era of high-stakes accountability. Principals' desire for professional growth was largely tied to their commitment to their schools" and students' success. An example of this was provided in Drew's statement.

I need to be up to date on the latest techniques, the latest research and everything that is going to inspire my teachers and of course my kids. We take the initiative also as individuals to search, go to conferences, go to workshops, and get on the web site to find information. Anytime a question is polled to me that I don't know, I try to find the answer to it by any means necessary.

Six participants spoke of the benefit they felt they received by attending professional development activities, e.g., district workshops, state, and national conferences. Five of

the participants spoke of the benefits of being a part of professional organizations.

Diane's statement exhibits the perceptions of other participants who believe they benefited from being a part of professional organizations. She stated,

One thing that is helpful to me is that I am very active in our state and national principal associations elementary principals It is a very good support network for me and it has helped me keep current on information and resources for my teachers.

Having knowledge of the most recent *Best Practices in Education* has a direct impact on principals being successful in an era of high-stakes accountability.

The participants indicated that their desire for professional growth and development was mainly intrinsically motivated; however, some stated that their desire was both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Toni's explanation provided an example of being intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. "Our system really does a great job providing training. However, as a principal, you have to have a desire to stay informed of what's going on and the changes that are taking place..... so I say both." According to the participants who stated that they were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, they stated that their extrinsic motivation was fueled by the local school districts doing an excellent job with professional development.

All participants spoke of doing their own professional reading and initiating conversations with colleagues. Elizabeth's statement is an example of this.

I do it in professional development opportunity when I can. I try to read as much as possible. We discuss, I have a good network of several principals that I communicate with regularly and get ideas from them. When I am trying to figure out what to do, I might call one of them up and say, "There is this problem I have, can you help?." I get ideas from them.



The participants demonstrated mixed and varied feelings of being supported internally and externally. Participants expressed support at different levels of education, while two participants felt that they had no support at all. Barry stated,

Our school district has really dedicated a lot of money and opportunities to professional growth. That's....that's a big commitment in our school district to offer that for us. So....there is all kinds of training. I don't get a lot of outside support at the state department level or anything like that.

In conjunction with district support, Toni felt supported on both levels. She stated,

We have various workshops, training, making sure we are doing what we are suppose to be doing as far as the instructional leaders, and what comes down from the State Department and what have you.....making sure we are following through on that. Whenever we need to contact the State Department for assistance, I feel comfortable that we can always pick up the phone or email someone at the State Department.

Sharon captured the voice and sentiments of those who did not feel supported.

Emotionally she asserted,

Central Office has played no significant role. It has been all through my own initiatives. It has always been my mentality to make sure that I am informed of ....all the State Department's initiatives. I don't mind working with the State Department. I have found that people in the Central Office kind of go against the State Department and it doesn't make much sense to me.

While all the participants possessed a "want to," intrinsically motivated spirit about professional development, when asked about their performance accountability standards as principals, all of them referred to NCLB accountability standards for student achievement. All of them were keenly aware of their AYP goals and percentages as well as the possibility of being removed from their position for poor performance. Yet, when the question about their performance standards was rephrased or redirected, principals continued to speak on student achievement and the possibility of being removed from their position. Diane, in fact, was the only principal who made a direct correlation with

principals' performance standards. She stated, "So, I do see a lot of overlap with PEPE and NCLB." However, no other principal articulated their performance standards and expectations.

When asked where they learned of their accountability standards for principals, all of them stated either from Central office, other colleagues, or attending workshops with the State Department. Jean, as a matter of fact, stated, "I'm still confused." The knowledge of performance standards for principals did not seem to be well communicated. Sharon's statements really echoed the lack of communication regarding principal accountability standards. She stated,

After the first result came back from NCLB, I began to learn about Accountability.....Before then, I didn't really know and no one had a clue. It was just like taking a test and seeing where you land. I didn't know what to expect or look for or how we were going to be graded. I don't think at the time we took it, we even knew the subject areas that were going to be graded. It was like taking our driver's license test without first reading the book. I was never made aware of the standards.

### *Demands of the Principalship*

Theme five is the demands of the principalship. NCLB with its widespread demand to improve student achievement has really changed the landscape of the 21st Century principal. The demands have morphed. The principalship has become multi-faceted and extremely complex. The roles now have expanded to include instructional leadership as well as management responsibilities. All of the participants explained their job demands in totality. Jean's statement demonstrates the magnitude and scope of the position, adding, "We are expected to do everything." Elizabeth stated, "I feel like I'm juggling sometimes." Larry described the feelings he had of being a principal in an era of high

stakes accountability as being, “very intense.” Lewis further called his experience “overwhelming.” All of the participants expressed concerns of being faced with competing demands, greater accountability, being less appreciated, and working longer hours.

All participants indicated that there are many pressures that come along with working in an era of high stakes accountability, namely the lofty goals of NCLB as related to students achievement. Diane acknowledged that, “NCLB has created an instructional focus.” However, the threat of sanctions and being removed as principal was a major concern for all participants. One example of threat of sanctions, Brian stated, “I guess the accountability issues we are confronted with..... is that our jobs could be on the line, if scores don't go up.” Sharon added a profound statement by saying,

The principal or the principalship is the only job that is directly impacted by NCLB. It seems as if the principals are the only people who are actually being held accountable.....because if the school is what they so call a failing school, it is the principal that’s going to be removed before any teachers.

Several of the principals shared concerns about public and political scrutiny. Barry explained,

You are basically called out in public for your test scores, when they are printed in the newspaper, and published everywhere, every year. Nobody wants to be singled out for not having done what they were supposed to. There is added pressure there.

The participants all indicated having a feeling of anxiety and being stressed by their jobs but for different reasons. Don stated, “I think they all need to know that the level of stress is great in this position.” On the contrary, two principals said, they only felt stressed by the demands of having to support teachers. In addition to being stressed, several principals spoke of having health related issues. Lewis stated, “I’m absolutely sure this job has taken some years off of my life.” In addressing the stresses they face, the

participants' universal answer was to be organized and prepared. Most of them further suggested prioritizing, working collaboratively with others, and exercising as other mechanisms of addressing stress.

However, the personal affect of losing quality time with family ranked as a top priority. Eight participants indicated a major concern for the number of hours the role of being the principal takes away from their families. Elizabeth's statement captures the affect the demands of the principalship have had on the personal life of the participants. She stated,

I try to take more things home with me at night. I try to do more reading at night at home. I take my laptop home and work on some things at home. So I am not spending late hours here at work. Personally, it's more stressful than it use to be. I usually come here on the weekend for at least 2 to 3 hours and try to get some work done when there is no one around. I can work without being disturbed a little bit more. It definitely has made my personal life a little more stressful, but I try to find a balance so that I can leave it here at school and separate my personal from professional lives as much as possible.

In summary, listening to the participant interviews was revealing. It was insightful to hear them and watch them accept accountability and responsibility for almost everything that occurs on a school's campus. Some principals seemed a little frustrated with all of the responsibilities and demands being placed on the principal, but still, accepted accountability for total school operations and addressed the demands of the position.

Table 2. Summary of Themes and Sub-themes

Summary of Themes and Sub-themes	
Themes	Sub-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative Roles and Responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional Leadership</li> <li>• Management Responsibilities</li> <li>• Safety and Security</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative/ Shared Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegation</li> <li>• Teaming</li> <li>• Open Communication</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relentless Commitment to Student Success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unwavering resolve about Student Achievement</li> <li>• Accepting of Accountability</li> <li>• Instructional Monitoring</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Growth and Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Professional Organizations</li> <li>• Intrinsically and Extrinsically Motivated</li> <li>• Professional Readings and Conversation with Colleagues</li> <li>• Internal and External Supports</li> <li>• Accountability Standards</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demands of the Principalship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-faceted and Complex</li> <li>• Increased Responsibilities</li> <li>• Threats of Sanctions/ Public Scrutiny</li> <li>• Anxiety/ Stress in the Workplace</li> <li>• Personal Affects</li> </ul>

### Site Observations

In all locations artifacts and site observations provided additional perspectives of participants' administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability.

The artifacts collected and observation data further provided an opportunity to explore similarities and differences across school sites.

With regard to the site observations, the sites in this study were selected based on the principals meeting the established criteria for this study. The researcher had the privilege of visiting two sites during their Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) visits. All sites comprised in this study at a glance seemed orderly, pleasant, and well-managed. The environments had a welcoming feel to them. In all cases, upon arrival, the researcher was warmly greeted by the office staff, students, and the principal, if available. Some of the participants were not in their office when the researcher arrived. They were out in their buildings visiting classrooms. During the time in which the researcher waited, an attempt was made to speak with office personnel, students, teachers, or other staff if they happened to be in the office. Their interactions could be described as very cordial and almost friendly, although some students appeared apprehensive as to my purpose. The physical environments of the schools as a whole appeared to be well-maintained, painted with bright attractive colors, and neatly decorated with student-centered educational resources and materials. The one site that was the exception to this case was making preparations to occupy a new facility in the upcoming year.

As the researcher toured the various facilities with the principals, the interpersonal interaction of the principals with those they encountered was noted. The exchanges between the principals, teachers, support workers, and students can all be described as respectful and pleasant. The researcher would further classify most of the school environments as being up-tempo and fast-paced. There was a sense of urgency in the air. Conversational exchanges were very brief between school personnel and almost always

seemed to be focused on educational issues. As we walked and shared professional experiences, some principals eagerly shared information on student achievement and accomplishments, while others talked about issues or concerns affecting them and their schools. At no time, during any of my tours, were children witnessed roaming the hallways without a purpose. Displays of student work, with rubrics, were evident in some cases. However, this was less evident at the high school level. All sites seemed to have a keen focus on data-driven instruction and meeting the established and expected mandates of NCLB. This was evident by the data boards observed at many sites. Most data boards contained student achievement information from the previous year as well as formative assessment data of current students. Supporting documentation of being data-driven was evident by the observation of data-binders and other instructional files which demonstrated the rigid monitoring of students' academic performance.

When observing classrooms, the researcher made specific note that engaging instruction was evident and purposeful in most classrooms. Classroom climates that exhibited warmth, rapport, and mutual acceptance were observed on all campuses, yet there were some that did not fully meet this expectation. Evidence of rigorous and innovative instructional methodology dissenting from traditional educational practices could be observed in some cases. Some classrooms were neatly decorated with authentic teaching resources that illustrated learning processes that were useful during instructional activities. Further, the same rooms often had quality student work posted that demonstrated rigorous application processes and higher order thinking skills. Whole group instruction, however, seemed to be a commonplace in some classrooms.

## Artifacts

Artifact collection was easily assessable and was particularly useful information in validating and supporting the perceptions shared by participants during the in-depth interviews. Orderly binders of meeting agendas, students' assessment data (both formative and summative), and teacher professional development were observed on all sites. Typical artifacts collected across school sites included faculty meeting agendas, grade level or department meeting agendas, school improvement plans, and classroom walk-through or observation protocols. Collected artifacts further demonstrated the participants' motivation, initiative, and innovations in meeting the demands of NCLB. The meeting agendas showed the participants constant efforts in identifying the most effective instructional programs and strategies to meet the needs of the students they serve.

Professional development meeting agendas as well as grade level or department meeting agendas across sites showed an intense focus on instructional best practices and substantiated descriptions and explanations given by participants in regards to providing professional development. Participants provided professional development for teachers that were directly aimed at improving instructional quality. In all cases, the instructional or professional development component of every agenda was led by the principal, assistant principal, teacher leader, academic coach, or curriculum specialist.

At all sites, the researcher was able to obtain artifacts that directly addressed the participants' role of an instructional leader, a response prominently mentioned in all participant responses. In addition, the researcher was able to obtain Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) documents from all sites. The CIP documents further validated



the participants' roles as instructional leaders, their implementation of shared/ collaborative leadership, and their management responsibilities. In addition, all sites had instructional walk-through or classroom observation protocols readily available which addressed instructional quality that affects student learning and achievement.

### Summary

Data were collected in this study for the purpose of answering the central research question of “*What meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” The sub-questions for this study were:

1. How do principals describe their roles in an era of high-stakes accountability?
2. How do principals operate daily in an era of high-stakes accountability?
3. How do principals develop their skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
4. How do principals adjust to and handle the unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities?
5. What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals' personal and professional lives?
6. What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
7. What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?

Data were collected using face to face, in depth interviews, artifact collection, and site observations. Chapter 4 provided a detailed summary of the findings of principals' perspectives of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability. The five major themes that emerged were administrative roles and responsibilities, collaborative/ shared leadership, relentless commitment to student success, professional growth and development, and demands of the principalship. Using thick, rich descriptions, along with participants' direct quotes, the researcher created a depiction of the participants' perspectives toward their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

Leadership is indispensable. The focus on high-stakes testing and accountability is intense. The recent school reform movement has demanded high levels of accountability from school principals and placed them at the forefront of the nation's educational agenda. According to Buck (2003), being a school principal is perhaps the most demanding position in the field of education. As described in Chapter 1 of this study, the complexity and ambiguity of the principalship has morphed. In this era of high-stakes accountability, principals are now faced with trying to balance multiple instructional priorities veiled with enormous administrative tasks. "Over the last decade, scholarship on instructional leadership has become deepened and more nuanced" (Murphy, 2004, p.66). Lashway (2000) believed that accountability, added to the already broad list of principal responsibilities, required new forms of leadership to be implemented under careful public scrutiny, while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel.

As a result, collaborative/ shared leadership has become a leadership style of choice among principals to meet the high demands and expectations. Brown and Gioia (2002), asserted that they believed a more flexible, distributive leadership is required to cope with the new demands being placed on leadership. High-stakes accountability posed both a

formidable challenge and an exciting opportunity for school principals. Principals in Alabama feel a sense of being overwhelmed by the multiplicity of roles and responsibilities along with pressures associated with greater accountability measures related to NCLB and state assessments. Principals are not immune to the emotions and stress that comes with the job demands. Gronn (2003) reported that scholars' note that leaders are working within a role that is becoming increasingly conflicted, complex and complicated, resulting in role anxiety, emotional stress and professional burnout. Further, Oatley and Jenkins (1996) suggested that in an era of testing and accountability, profound emotions are often a result of purposes that cannot be achieved; feelings of power or powerlessness; and relationships that lack trust, all of which may result in anxiety, guilt, frustration, or fear. The strain of the principalship has ushered school administrators to rely on organizational skills, professional development, carving out personal time, and making time for physical exercise to address the psychological and sociological demands of the position. Pierce (2000) believed that while the sand is shifting under the feet of principals in an era of high-stakes accountability, many people take on the role of being a school principal believing that they can make a difference and have a significant impact on childrens' lives. As a result, the purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover and explore perceptions of principals in Alabama as to what meaning they make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability.

### Summary of Major Findings

This study described the administrative roles and experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. A thorough description of this phenomenon was

gathered through interviews, observations, and artifacts. The interviews provided information of how participants viewed their roles and experiences as well as how they functioned in an era of high-stakes accountability. Artifacts and site observations provided additional perspectives of how participants implemented their administrative roles in an era of high-stakes accountability, authenticated perceptions shared by the participants, and provided an opportunity for the researcher to look for similarities or differences across sites.

This qualitative study generated data from 10 participants. Three elementary school principals, 2 middle school principals, and 4 high school principals participated in this study. All participants were selected on the basis of having met the established criteria of having been a principal in Alabama, in an era of high-stakes accountability for a minimum of 5 years. From an analysis of all the data collected, 5 themes and 21 sub-themes emerged. The five themes that emerged were administrative roles and procedures, collaborative/ shared leadership, relentless commitment to student success, professional growth and development, and demands of the principalship.

### Research Questions

This qualitative study was designed to explore what it is like to be a principal in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. The central research question was: *“What meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability?”*

The sub-questions for this study were:

1. How do principals describe their roles in an era of high-stakes accountability?

2. How do principals operate daily in an era of high-stakes accountability?
3. How do principals develop their newly required skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
4. How do principals adjust to and handle the unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities?
5. What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals' personal and professional lives?
6. What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?
7. What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?

### Research Questions Answered

The study findings addressed the central research question, “*What meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” and the research sub-questions posed in this study. Five themes emerged from the study of the administrative roles and experiences of Alabama principals.

#### *Research Question One*

The first sub-question, “*How do principals describe their roles in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” was described by all participants as being an all inclusive position. The researcher found that the participants commonly described their roles in an

era of high-stakes accountability as having mega-responsibilities and great accountability. This finding confirmed Spiri (2001) which concluded that principals felt a new type of vulnerability and debilitating sense of accountability when face with unprecedented demands and responsibilities. Participants described their roles as “being everything to everybody,” “very intense,” and “overwhelming.” Brian described his role by stating, “I am responsible for almost everything that takes place here.” Participants, in no certain order, all went through a myriad of task domains associated with instructional leadership. Their list of tasks included monitoring teaching and instruction, motivating teachers and students, providing quality staff development and support for teachers; using data to monitor student academic achievement; communicating effectively; and evaluating teacher performance.

The researcher of this qualitative study found that high-stakes accountability has really focused the principalship on instructional leadership and testing mandates. This confirmed Lashway (2002), which determined that instructional leadership remains a dominant theme in the era of school reform and concluded that instructional leadership has taken on a much more complex and sophisticated form. Barry’s response best describes this essence. He stated,

My number 1 responsibility is to make sure teachers are instructing students based on state standards so they are prepared to.....to perform satisfactorily or meet Adequate Yearly Progress on those state tests.

The researcher also found that all participants acknowledged the central focus of their role as being an instructional leader, with the purpose of ensuring academic success for all students. This agreed with a study conducted by Lezotte (1994) which found that all effective schools’ research have repeatedly identified instructional leadership as critical.

Evidence of this was provided when Drew explained his role by saying, “The principal has to be the instructional leader.”

Artifacts and site observations corroborated participants’ perspectives of their roles and administrative experiences. An analysis of artifacts revealed that principals did in fact provide instructional leadership by monitoring instruction through classroom observations, reviewing lesson plans, providing professional development, and using data to drive instruction. The School Climate Section of the CIP was instrumental in substantiating participants’ management responsibilities. Site observations further conducted at each site provided the researcher with a context for the roles and experiences described by each participant. Site observations provided illustrations of the complexity and ambiguity of the participants’ roles. The researcher further observed the daily high-paced demands placed on the principalship. Participants appeared rushed and operated with a sense of urgency. In essence, the participants viewed their roles of being a principal in Alabama as one of mega-responsibilities and great accountability.

#### *Research Question Two*

The second sub-question, “*How do principals operate daily in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” generated collaborative/ shared leadership as a common response among participants as to how they operate to meet the demands of NCLB and high-stakes accountability. The researcher found that the participants employed more collaborative leadership practices in an era of high-stakes accountability. This finding confirmed Datnow and Murphy (2003) who concluded that one of the key roles of principal in implementing successful comprehensive school reform was performing the function of



providing a collaborative work environment, and nurturing teacher involvement and leadership. Realizing that the job has grown to be too large for one individual, all participants agree that they have been more inclusive in their leadership approaches. As an example of collaboration, Lewis stated,

I work very closely with my assistant principals and guidance counselors. They are my eyes and ears in the building. They assist me with everything, making sure children get a quality education.

The researcher of this qualitative inquiry found that all participants practiced delegating responsibilities and teaming as a way of meeting the demands of high-stakes accountability. This finding concurred with Camburn, Rowan, & Taylor, (2003) which stated that through the process of distributed leadership, multiple school members exercise instructional leadership in order to affect instructional improvement. All participants' responses indicated a comfort level with delegating responsibilities. However, all participants wanted a major role in instructional leadership. As an example of delegating responsibilities, Elizabeth stated, "I try to make sure that I delegate what I can delegate to other people." In addition, Sharon's statement provided an illustration of teaming. She stated, "We ensure that everyone is involved on a team. It helps keep us focused."

The researcher found that effective communication is a key component of collaborative/ shared leadership. Six participants explicitly mentioned the importance of having open lines of communication. Diane expressed that, "Communication is a big part of what I do." Observations of interaction between the participants and their faculty and staff members documented the collaborative/ shared leadership approach which was consistent in all responses provided. Conversations between the parties were generally

brief, yet appeared to be focused on instructional quality. The participants in this study demonstrated a clear understanding of the staggering array of responsibilities of the principalship. In an era of high-stakes accountability, principals are turning to a more collaborative model of leadership.

The researcher found that the participants in this study possessed an unwavering resolve about student achievement and were accepting of the accountability demands of the principalship. This finding was supported by Anderson (2004) who stated that the principalship is probably the single most powerful force for improving school effectiveness and achieving excellence in education. Participants consistently demonstrated their willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty for students.

Sharon's statement is an illustration of unwavering resolve. She stated,

Visiting other schools, both similar and different, even though we are an urban school, we don't make any excuses. Taking into consideration of being an urban school, we don't have extra resources and extra people. We don't use that as an excuse. We just make it happen."

As an example of accepting of accountability demands of the principalship, Drew stated, "We need to be held responsible, because if we are not held responsible then there is no accountability held on any level."

The researcher further found that participants viewed classroom monitoring as the best way of ensuring student academic success in school. This finding confirmed a number of studies Andres & Soder (1987), Freedman & Lafleur (2002), Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides (1990), Sagor (1992) which provided evidence that when the principal visits the classroom addressing curriculum and instruction, the quality of instruction improves. All participants mentioned classroom walk-throughs and observations as means of ensuring quality teaching and learning.

### *Research Question Three*

The third sub-question, “How do principals develop their skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?” was explained by participants as a function of professional growth and development. The researcher found that all participants believe that professional development was the key to being successful in an era of high-stakes accountability. This agreed with a study conducted by Ruffin (2007) which stated that principals must continuously seek ways to improve professionally to work in an era of high-stakes accountability. All participants were committed to being the best they could be to benefit the students that they serve.

The researcher further found that participants were mainly intrinsically motivated about professional development. This finding is supported by Blaydes (2004) who stated that to effectively utilize the power of the principalship, the principal must build a framework for his or her leadership. The participants all expressed intrinsic motivation to improve their knowledge and professional skills. Four participants said they were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to improve due to the high quality professional development provided by their school districts which inspired them to learn. The participants all viewed professional development as central to being successful in an era of high-stakes accountability, both individually and for the faculty and staffs which they led. Essentially, professional efficacy propelled participants to seek professional development to enhance their skills. Elizabeth explained, “I’m motivated in that I want to take advantage of all these resources that have been put in place to make me do my job better.” All participants said they take advantage of professional development

opportunities, reading professional literature, and consulting with colleagues to enhance their skills. Barry's statement captured this concept. He stated,

I develop my skills through....staff development.....on-going staff development. Also, talking with my colleagues like yourself, having discussions on issues, and reading literature – the latest literature out there about school improvement, and constantly visiting classrooms. You learn a lot when you go into classrooms and talk to teachers.....It's just a plethora of ways we learn.

This statement makes it evident that principals in this study openly and willingly seek to improve the skills to work in an era of high-stakes accountability in a number of ways. Being abreast of all the changes in education and being adequately equipped to lead in this decade of school reform is essential.

The researcher in this qualitative study found that the support of principals in an era of high-stakes accountability was inconsistent among the participants studied. Participants expressed mixed and varied feelings about being supported internally and externally. Some participants felt supported on some or all levels, while other participants did not feel supported at all. As examples of the inconsistent support, Barry stated,

Our school district has really dedicated a lot of money and opportunities to professional growth. That's....that's a big commitment in our school district to offer that for us. So....there is all kinds of training. I don't get a lot of outside support at the state department level or anything like that.

Toni described the support she felt in this way:

We have various workshops and training, making sure we are doing what we are supposed to be doing as far as the instructional leaders, and what comes down from the State Department and what have you.....making sure we are following through on that. Whenever we need to contact the State department for assistance, I feel comfortable that we can always pick up the phone or email someone at the State Department.

Sharon stated:

Central Office has played no significant role. It has been all through my own initiatives. It has always been my mentality to make sure that I am informed of....all

the State Department's initiatives. I don't mind working with the State Department. I have found that people in the Central Office kind of go against the State Department and it doesn't make much sense to me.

The researcher further found that although participants were motivated to receive professional development, the majority of them were unable to articulate their performance standards. This finding confirmed Willis (2007) which stated that principals were largely motivated to receive professional development to improve the performance skills but, had limited knowledge of the performance standards for principals. When asked about principals' performance standards almost all of them defaulted to NCLB Accountability Sanctions and the threat of sanctions. None of the participants articulated Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders, ISLLC Standards, or appropriate performance standards for principals at their respective levels as a response what their expected performance standards were.

The researcher found confusion and/ or a breakdown in the communication of performance standards for principals. This finding agreed with an earlier study conducted by Willis (2007) which found that there was an inconsistency in the communication of performance standards for principals from various levels. The participants almost all defaulted to NCLB Sanctions when asked about their performance standards. When asked how did they learn of their performance standards, all stated from Central Office Personnel, other colleagues, or workshops provided by the State Department of Education. Jean's statement best describes the breakdown in communication of performance standards for principals. She stated, "I am still confused." Sharon provided a more lengthy statement illustrating the lack of communication. She stated,

After the first result came back from NCLB, I began to learn about Accountability.....Before then, I didn't really know and no one had a clue. It

was just like taking a test and seeing where you land. I didn't know what to expect or look for or how we were going to be graded. I don't think at the time we took it, we even knew the subject areas that were going to be graded. It was like taking our driver's license test without first reading the book. I was never made aware of the standards.

#### *Research Question Four*

The fourth sub-question, "*How do principals adjust to and handle the unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities?*" generated similar responses as the third sub-question among participants. The researcher found that principals handle unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities by being proactive and seeking professional development. This finding also confirmed Blaydes (2004) who stated that to effectively utilize the power of the principalship, the principal must build a framework for his or her leadership. As stated in the previous question, the participants all possessed an unwavering resolve about students' academic achievement; therefore, they constantly sought ways to address the changes in their job responsibilities and to stay informed. They sought professional development, read literature, conducted personal research on new and changing educational issues, and consulted with colleagues.

The researcher of the qualitative inquiry found that the participants employed a distributed, collaborative/ shared leadership approach to addressing unanticipated changes in their roles and responsibilities. Brown and Dennis (2002) agreed that flexible, distributive leadership was required to cope with the new demands being placed on leadership. Other additional mechanisms of handling unanticipated changes were also identified. Seven participants indicated relying on or consulting with their Central Offices to meet the demands of unexpected change. Elizabeth stated,

We have a school improvement specialist that is available that work with us on our continuous improvement plan. He advises us on our walk through and those sorts of things. We have a curriculum coordinator that helps us with the critical issues and professional development issues and that sort of thing. We have those 2 people we can call on. The central office provides opportunities for our professional development.

Two principals felt comfortable using the State Department of Education as a resource.

As an example, Toni stated, “Whenever we need to contact the State Department for assistance, we can always pick up the phone or email someone at the State Department.”

The researcher found that participants were all self-motivated and committed to seeking answers and solutions to better support quality teaching and learning. This finding was also supported by Anderson (2004) who found the principal to be the single most essential element in improving school effectiveness and increasing student achievement.

#### *Research Question Five*

The fifth sub-question, “*What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals’ personal and professional lives?*” was described as intense and enormous. The researcher found that the participants in an era of high-stakes accountability have more job demands, work longer hours, get less thanks, and have significantly more stress. This finding confirmed Lashway (2002) which stated that instructional leadership is the dominant theme of today, but it has taken on a more sophisticated form. In paraphrase, the participants all stated, “The workload has increased to the point it is almost impossible to get it all done at work.” As an example of the increased demands, Don stated, “I think they all need to know that the level of stress is great in this position.” Lewis extended his description of this impact by saying,

Pressures are almost to the point where they are unbearable. In the sense, not only do I expect certain things on myself, not only does my superintendent expect certain things of me, but now everyone in our Nation expect certain things of me, starting with our President.

The researcher found that participants are frustrated by the threat of NCLB Sanctions, being removed from their jobs, and the political and public scrutiny of the position. If not explicitly stated, all participants expressed concerns with NCLB sanctions and possibly being removed from their jobs. Sharon's statement is an illustrated the frustrations experienced by the participants as a result of the threat of sanctions. She stated,

The principal or the principalship is the only job that is directly impacted by NCLB. It seems as if the principals are the only people who are actually being held accountable.....because if the school is what they so call a failing school, it is the principal that's going to be removed before any teachers.

As an example of the concern for the political and public scrutiny, Barry stated,

You are basically called out in public for your test scores, when they are printed in the newspaper, and published everywhere, every year. Nobody wants to be singled out for not having done what they were supposed to. There is added pressure there.

The researcher of this qualitative study found that the participants felt a significant amount of stress and anxiety in the workplace. The participants all found their jobs far more stressful than they used to be. Lewis' statement best described the anxiety and stress felt by the participants. He stated, "Unfortunately it raises your blood pressure health-wise. I am absolutely sure this job has taken some years off of my life."

Participants further indicated that they try merging their professional and personal lives as a way of meeting the high demands of the job.

The researcher found that the loss of quality family time and the demand placed on participants' personal life was a major concern. The participants admitted having to take work home at night or even working on weekends to get everything accomplished. As an



example of lost family time and demands placed on participants' personal lives, Elizabeth stated,

I try to take more things home with me at night. I try to do more reading at night at home. I take my laptop home and work on some things at home. So I am not spending late hours here at work. Personally, it's more stressful than it use to be. I usually come here on the weekend for at least 2 to 3 hours and try to get some work done when there is no one around. I can work without being disturbed a little bit more. It definitely has made my personal life a little more stressful, but I try to find a balance so that I can leave it here at school and separate my personal from professional lives as much as possible.

The frustration among participants was evident. Brian's statement best expressed the participant's frustration level. He stated, "The demands have impacted how I feel about my job. The appreciation I have for my job is not the same."

#### *Research Question Six*

The sixth sub-question, "*What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?*" drew interestingly varied comments from participants. When first asked, participants seemed a little confused about internal supports. After clarification of the question, participants responded to the internal supports they have. The researcher found that there were inconsistencies in internal supports among participants. This finding confirmed Willis (2007) which stated all principals have not received the same level of training and preparation to work in an era of high-stakes accountability. Participants stated that they relied on assistant principals, support staff, Central Office, and primarily other colleagues for internal support.

The researcher of this study found that the majority of principals felt collaboration with colleagues was necessary in acquiring the skills to work in an era of high-stakes

accountability. Seven of 10 principals expressed that collaboration with colleagues was significant in their acquiring the skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability. Diane stated, “We, as principals also collaborate about what is taking place.” Drew added,

I try to read as many articles on Ed. Leadership as I can. Pick up the phone.... I call principals in the area trying to get ideas they’re working on.

Three administrators mentioned partnering with and sharing with other schools as a form of internal support. As an example of partnering with other schools, Toni expressed, “I think the collaboration with the different groups, and even the schools, we work together to find out what’s going on and I think that’s going to be the key.”

Eight participants felt that they had great support from a district office or Central Office level. As an illustration, Don stated, “I feel like we have had good support from our system and from the administration in here.” Barry further expressed,

Our school district has really dedicated a lot of money and opportunities to professional development. That’s....that’s a big commitment in our school district growth to offer that for us. So....there is all kinds of training.

The researcher found that two participants working in Title I Schools, representing two districts of the lower median income average, which served predominantly black students did not feel adequately supported in their efforts by Central Office, and felt that any support obtained was left to their own initiative. Jean’s statement is an illustration of the inconsistent support expressed by participants.

As far as someone coming in from Central Office working with us "no". I have discussions with my peers and co-workers in other states like Georgia. I have friends in Georgia, New York and in other places. We always converse about NCLB and what I can do to make my school better. Central Office provides little to no support.

### *Research Question Seven*

The last sub-question, “*What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing their performance skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” was also expressed in varying degrees. Participants again asked for clarification when this question was posed. The researcher found that all participants stated that they benefited from workshops, professional development activities, and attending professional conferences. This finding as well, confirmed Blaydes (2004) who stated that to effectively utilize the power of the principalship, the principal must build a framework for his or her leadership. The majority of principals expressed that they attend professional conferences as a support mechanism. Some principals identified professional organizations as an external support. The organizations primarily identified were state and national associations. It was clear that participants felt better supported internally than externally. On the contrary, only a small number, two participants viewed the State Department as a viable option for support.

### Summary of Answered Research Questions

This qualitative study yielded important information about the administrative experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. This study found that principals viewed their roles as extremely demanding and complex. However, they viewed the role as instructional leader as their most important job function. The participants employed collaborative/ shared leadership to address the increased expectations of their job roles. All participants indicated that they were highly motivated to seek professional development to improve their job skills. The level of support

experienced by the participants varied tremendously in their job roles. Some participants expressed being supported internally by their local school districts. Other participants indicated that they felt supported both internally by their local school districts, along with being supported externally by the State Department of Education. Interestingly, some principals expressed that they did not feel supported at all. While participants were willing to accept accountability for their total school operations, ironically and overwhelmingly, participants were not able articulating their job performance standards as principals. Participants also expressed that the demands of the principalship have affected them both personally and professionally. Participants cited increased responsibilities, NCLB Sanctions (job threats), and longer work hours as being major sources of stress. Participants expressed extreme concerns about being away from their families. Some participants also reported health related issues as a result of the pressures they faced.

### Implications of Study

In an era of high-stakes accountability, the principalship has been pushed to the forefront with a myriad of responsibilities. Principals have found themselves being held responsible for all aspects of school operations. Gill (2006) acknowledged that leadership has become a key issue both in the public and private sector. It is widely established that the effect of the principal's leadership is vital to the effectiveness of the school when it comes to student achievement (Marzano, Walters, McNulty, 2005; Lambert, 2002; Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, et. al 2006). The researcher, as a school principal and school reform consultant, believes it is imperative to have a deeper understanding of the

effects of accountability as it relates to principals in various school districts. The findings for each study question led the researcher to develop implications related to the administrative roles and experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. The major findings of this qualitative study are related to the themes that emerged as a result of the meanings formulated from significant statements and phrases which were: 1) Administrative Roles and Responsibilities, 2) Collaborative/ Shared Leadership, 3) Relentless Commitment to Student Success, 4) Professional Growth and Development, 5) and Demands of the Principalship.

#### *Administrative Roles and Responsibilities*

This study on the leadership experiences of principals in Alabama is very beneficial for schools, districts, school boards, and universities in validating the complexities faced by school principals. The school principal is the essential figure in creating a successful school. Principals demonstrated willingness to accept the complexity and high demands of the job believing they can make a difference. However, with the myriad of responsibilities, they are reduced to a “jack of all trades and a master of none.” With all the demands and responsibilities of high-stakes accountability, school districts, school boards, and the State Department of Education must find solutions to allow for adequate staffing of schools. Ensuring adequate staffing would provide for more effective, collaborative/ shared leadership.

With instructional leadership being the key focus of the principalship, developing a mandated curriculum specialist or coach position or instructional assistant principal position would significantly assist the principal in monitoring curriculum and instruction

at the local school level. This position would help the principal in balancing the overwhelming demands of instructional leadership and managerial tasks being combined.

It is recommended that districts and universities develop programs which highlight and demonstrate effective approaches to leadership in an era of high-stakes accountability, that would allow principals and prospective principals to develop their leadership framework and the skills necessary to work under NCLB. Adequate preparation and understanding of the principalship is a necessity to be successful in the high-stakes era.

#### *Collaborative/ Shared Leadership*

Effective implementation of collaborative/ shared leadership is an essential strategy for principals in meeting the demands of the high-stakes accountability era. Principals have become extremely flexible and amenable to collaborative/ shared leadership. However, collaborative/ shared leadership, delegation of authority, and teaming are not just things you do. They require high skill levels and a deep understanding of the process, if it is to be implemented effectively. Developing and conducting professional development on collaborative/ shared leadership, delegation of authority, and teaming would allow principals to develop their skills in using these strategies. In addition, it is recommended that principals be provided with professional development that would enable them to have an understanding of the importance of establishing and maintaining personal relationships with a wide range of staff members.

If principals practice collaborative/ shared leadership, they must have people surrounding them that they can depend on. Creating teacher-leader networks would allow

teachers to develop their leadership abilities, assist in the decision-making process, thereby being an integral part of a successful school culture.

### *Relentless Commitment to Student Success*

Principals in this study possessed a deep commitment to student success. Districts and the State Department of Education should find ways to support their commitment.

Schools should be adequately staffed and have the necessary resources to adequately instruct the students they serve. School districts should structure their personnel and staffs to support local schools and their initiative. School districts and universities should structure their professional development programs and their administrative preparation programs to provide principals with the necessary skills and knowledge to work in the high-stakes era.

In addition, the standards for schools administrators should be stressed in administrative preparation programs. The ambiguity of NCLB Sanctions and principal professional performance standards should be clarified. Having a clear understanding of the job standards plays a major role in how principals fulfill roles and responsibilities.

The majority of principals stated that they ensured quality teaching and student learning by visiting the classroom. Classroom observations have been documented to improve the instructional process. Developing training and professional development on effective classroom observations would allow the principal to become a more effective instructional leader.

### *Professional Growth and Development*

Professional growth and development emerged as the primary way for principals to develop their skills in an era of high-stakes accountability. Districts, the State Department of Education, and universities should develop programs that provide for the instructional leadership skills principals will need to be the instructional leaders. Professional learning opportunities that provide principals and prospective principals with a framework of leadership theory and practice is suggested. It is also recommended that problem-based projects be at the core of the learning experience. Hands-on, projects-based problems would allow principals to have real world exposure to the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century principalship. Further, principals and prospective principals should be afforded the opportunity to have exposure to highly successful principals. Mentoring, partnering, collaborative sharing, and observing are all benefits of this exposure.

### *Demands of the Principalship*

It is recommended that district leaders and schools boards receive professional development on the demands of the principalship. A thorough understanding of accountability era may affect how they carry out their executive responsibilities. Districts, school boards, and the State Department of Education should seek ways to remove the immediate threat of sanctions from schools and school administrators, thus eliminating the anxiety of stress of the job and the toll it takes on one's professional and personal life. Districts, school boards, the State Department of Education, and universities serving as supporting agencies can produce positive results as opposed to the threat of sanctions which often produces negative ones.



### Limitations of Study

This multi-site qualitative study was conducted with 10 K-12 principals in Alabama regarding their own perspectives as to “*what meaning do they make of their administrative roles and responsibilities in an era of high-stakes accountability?*” This study is limited to 10 practicing principals in the State of Alabama and may not be generalizable to other states and areas in the United States. This study is limited to practicing principals of public schools in Alabama and does not include the practices or behaviors of principals in the private school sector. This study focused on selected principals in Alabama who met the specified criteria and could purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon. Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researcher may have presented biases in the analysis and interpretations of findings.

### Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study was limited to 10 principals throughout the State of Alabama. In continuing along the lines of this research, it is recommended that this study be expanded to include more principals across the state and/ or nation to more fully investigate the phenomenon of what it is like to be a principal in an era of high-stakes accountability. Collaboration and shared leadership emerged as a leadership strategy commonly used by principals. Conducting a study to determine whether staffing patterns had an effect on how principals operate in an era of high-stakes accountability would be beneficial to principals and Human Resources personnel. Internal support at the district level is an essential element in an era of high-stakes accountability. It is recommended that a study

be conducted to determine how district support affects the way principals operate in an era of high-stakes accountability. The study produced a finding in which two principals both at Title I Schools, representing the lower median income averages, serving predominantly black students felt that they received little to no Central Office support in carrying out their duties in an era of high-stakes accountability. It is further recommended that a study be conducted to determine does racial ethnicity and economic income level have an impact on the way high-stakes accountability is implemented. Lastly, it is recommended that a study be conducted to determine how principals' preparation affects how they view instructional leadership in an era of high-stakes accountability.

### Summary

According to Fullan (2000) which provided a job description of the principal or instructional leader in an era of high-stakes accountability and increased expectations:

Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper and work double shifts (75 nights a year out). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency (Fullan, 2000, p. 156).

According to the participants in this study, the job of being a principal has increased almost most to the point of being undoable. Participants willingly accepted accountability and the demands that came with being the principal. All of the participants in this study perceived their role as an instructional leader as being the most important role they play at their respected schools sites. When explaining the many demands of being the instructional leader, principals went down a laundry list of tasks they were responsible for. All participants in some form illustrated how they used collaborative/ shared

leadership to meet the high demands and expectations of the accountability era. The participants all had an unwavering commitment to student achievement and school success. However, overwhelmingly, the vast majority of them were unable to articulate their professional performance standards as principals. Participants unanimously believed that professional growth and development was the best way to acquire the skills necessary to work in an era of high-stakes accountability. All participants were intrinsically motivated about professional growth opportunities. In districts where the participants felt that they had great professional development opportunities, they stated that they were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Internal and external support of school principals was found to be inconsistent. Two principals of Title I Schools, with lower median income averages for this study, and served predominantly black students did not feel they were supported at the Central Office level. Further, all participants recognized the enormous roles of the principalship. The demands of the principalship have become very complex. Principals spend their wheels trying to balance competing demands. The stress of the job has affected principals both professionally and personally. Some participants cited health problems as a result the new demands and pressures. Other participants expressed that they appreciate their jobs less in an era of high-stakes accountability.

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APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

Form 4: IRB Approval Form  
Identification and Certification of Research  
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and expires on January 23, 2012. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: WILLIS, CHARLES L

Co-Investigator(s):

Protocol Number: X071016014

Protocol Title: *Administrative roles and experiences of schools principals in an era of "high-stakes" accountability: a qualitative study of the perspectives of Alabama principals*

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 11/25/08. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 11/25/08

Date IRB Approval Issued: 3-10-09

*Marilyn Doss*

Marilyn Doss, M.A.

Vice Chair of the Institutional Review  
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be reported promptly to the IRB.

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701 20th Street, South  
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APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER



May 8, 2008

Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a doctoral research project in which I am conducting. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of 10 principals in Alabama in an era of “high-stakes accountability.” At this stage in the research, “high-stakes accountability will be defined as initiatives which seek to instill dramatic improvements in school performance by issuing salient rewards to high achieving schools and/ or imposing stiff sanctions on low performing schools.

You have purposefully been selected to be one of five participants in this project based on the fact that you meet the set criteria of having served a minimum of five years as principal in a public school setting in Alabama, in an era of “high-stakes” accountability. The purpose of this study is to understand the administrative roles and experiences of school principals in Alabama, in an era of high-stakes accountability and how accountability mandates have changed their role expectations.

The time frame for this project is May 2008 through December 2009. Because your experiences will be the focus of this study, your involvement will not necessarily be extensive. I anticipate conducting one face-to-face audio-recorded interview with you, job shadowing you for one academic day, and obtaining a copy of your journal entries and pertinent artifacts relative to your experiences during this time.

Prior to conducting any interview with you, I will provide you an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout these interviews you might also be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. I will take all precautions to ensure your anonymity. You would have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. I am totally appreciative to you for your participation in my research study and assisting me with my professional endeavors. The data from this research will be used in partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree and will be published in my dissertation. I will take precautions to ensure your anonymity, using a pseudonym.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if there is any additional information I can provide you. I look forward to hearing from you in the near future. I may be reached at (205) 902-9784 or by email at [clwillis1@bhamcityschools.org](mailto:clwillis1@bhamcityschools.org).

Sincerely,

Charles L. Willis, Jr.

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM



# Informed Consent Document



**TITLE OF RESEARCH:** Administrative roles and experiences of school principals in an era of “high-stakes” accountability: A phenomenological study of the perspectives of Alabama principals

**IRB PROTOCOL NUMBER:** X071016014

**INVESTIGATOR:** Mr. Charles L. Willis, Jr.

**SPONSOR:** UAB Department of Education/ Dissertation Study

**Explanation of Procedures**

---

I am writing to invite you to participate in a class research project which I am conducting. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of 10 principals in Alabama in an era of “high-stakes accountability.” At this stage in the research, “high-stakes accountability will be defined as initiatives which seek to instill dramatic improvements in school performance by issuing salient rewards to high achieving schools and/ or imposing stiff sanctions on low performing schools.

You have purposefully been selected to be one of ten participants in this project, based on the fact that you meet the set criteria of having served a minimum of five years as principal in a public school setting in Alabama, in an era of “high-stakes” accountability. The purpose of this project is to understand the leadership experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of “high-stakes” accountability and how accountability mandates have changed their role expectations.

The time frame for this project is June 2008 through December 2009. Although your experiences will be the focus of this study, your involvement will not necessarily be extensive. I anticipate conducting one face-to-face audio-recorded interview with you, job shadowing you for one academic day, and obtaining a copy of your journal entries and pertinent artifacts relative to your experiences during this time.

Prior to conducting any interview with you, I will provide you an outline of questions I want to ask in order to give you time to think about your responses. Throughout these interviews you might also be asked some clarifying questions to elicit additional details and examples from your responses. I will take all precautions to ensure your anonymity. You would have the option to withdraw from the study at any time should you choose to do so. I am totally appreciative to you for your participation in my study and assisting me with my professional endeavors. The data from this research study will be published in my doctoral dissertation. I will take all necessary precautions to ensure your anonymity, using pseudonyms.

## **Risks and Discomforts**

---

There are no known or foreseeable risks to participants.

## **Benefits**

---

You may not benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this study may help us better understand the leadership experiences of principals in Alabama in an era of high-stakes accountability. The study would add to the relatively silent literature on this phenomenon and may positively influence how principals are prepared and operate in Alabama in an era of “high-stakes accountability.”

## **Alternatives**

---

The alternative is to not participate.

## **Confidentiality**

---

Information obtained about you for this study will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. The results of this study will be made available to the investigator’s faculty advisor, representatives of Birmingham City Schools, and may be published in subsequent educational journals or books. The following groups will have access to private information that identifies you by name: the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Institutional Review Board (IRB). Electronic data will be stored electronically on computers that are password protected. The principal investigator will have sole access to these passwords.

Physical data will be stored in a locked metal file cabinet during the duration of the study and destroyed three years after the study completion. Your identity and your schools will be concealed using a number coding system. The audio-recordings and transcribed tapes of your interview will be stored in separate but secured locations accessible only by the researcher. Instead of using your actual name, field notes and audio files will be labeled using a coding system. Artifacts collected will also be labeled using the principal investigator’s coding system. All personal identifiers will only be known by the researcher.

## **Refusal or Withdrawal without Penalty**

---

Your taking part in this study is your choice. There will be no penalty if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide not to be in the study, you will not lose any benefits you are otherwise owed. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. Your choice to leave the study will not affect your relationship with the institution or the principal investigator.

You may be removed from the study without your consent if the sponsor ends the study or it is no longer feasible for you to be included in the study.

### **Cost of Participation**

---

There will be no cost to you from taking part in this study.

### **Payment for Participation in Research**

---

You will receive a \$10 gift certificate for taking part in this study. If you quit the study, you are still entitled to the \$10 gift certificate. Payments will be made no more than two weeks after your interview and observation has been completed.

### **Significant New Findings**

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A summary of the final report will be made available to all study participants.

### **Questions**

---

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research or a research-related injury including available treatments, please contact Charles L. Willis, Jr. I will be glad to answer any of your questions. My number is 205-788-8721. My cell phone number is (205) 902-9784.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore. Ms. Moore is the Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (OIRB). Ms. Moore may be reached at (205) 934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. If calling the toll -free number, press the option for “all other calls” or for an operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789. Regular hours for the Office of the IRB are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday. You may also call this number in the event the research staff cannot be reached or you wish to talk to someone else.

### **Legal Rights**

---

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this informed consent document.

INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

**Storage of Specimens**

---

Please initial your choice(s) below:

\_\_\_ I agree to allow my audio recorded interview, transcribed notes, and artifacts to be kept and used for future research on leadership experiences of principals in Alabama.

\_\_\_ I do not agree to allow my audio recorded interview, transcribed notes, and artifacts to be kept and used for future research on leadership experiences of principals in Alabama.

\_\_\_ I wish to be notified if my audio recorded interview, transcribed notes, and artifacts are going to be used for future research on leadership experiences of principals in Alabama.

**Signatures**

---

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness Date

APPENDIX D  
PARTICIPANT DATA SHEET

Participant Data Sheet

**Participant Information**

1. Participant's Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. Position \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many years have you been the principal of this school? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where have you served the most time as a school principal?
  - a. Urban schools \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Suburban schools \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Rural schools \_\_\_\_\_
5. At which university did you obtain your principal's certification? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What year? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many years were you a teacher? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What grade(s) did you teach? \_\_\_\_\_

**School Information**

9. Name of School \_\_\_\_\_
10. School Address \_\_\_\_\_
11. School Phone \_\_\_\_\_
12. School Fax \_\_\_\_\_
13. Number of staff members \_\_\_\_\_
14. Student Enrollment \_\_\_\_\_
15. Number of sections/classes at each grade level  
K \_\_\_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_  
5 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
**Researcher's Notes**

- |                                    |                   |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| _____ Informed Consent Form Signed | Date _____        |
| _____ Interview Completed          | Date _____        |
| _____ Observation Completed        | Date _____        |
| _____ Artifacts Collected          | Date _____        |
| _____ Study Codes Assigned         | Code _____        |
| _____ Gift Certificate Sent        | Date Mailed _____ |



APPENDIX E  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Interview Protocol

Name:

Organization:

Date:

Location:

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to share and express your thoughts. I will be asking you many questions and recording your responses verbatim. After the transcription of your thoughts and feelings, I will ask for your review of what I interpreted. It is important for the transcription to be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation.

What I am interested in finding out in this study is what it is like to be a principal in Alabama in an era of "high-stakes accountability." You've had a chance to review the questions I am going to ask you. Please express your thoughts and feelings as freely as you like. I really want to know your perspective concerning your experience in an era of "high-stakes accountability." I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along in order to clarify for me what you mean. Do you consent to have our interview to be tape recorded? Are you ready to start?

### **Interview Questions:**

1. Discuss your educational background, including your degrees, subjects taught, etc.

Probe: How long have you been a principal?

2. What is your understanding of the role of principal in an era of "high-stakes accountability?"

Probe: What are your tasks and responsibilities?

3. How do you perceive the status of the accountability movement as it relates to your job responsibilities?

Probe: What have been the major changes in your job responsibilities?

4. What do you consider your primary roles and responsibilities in the accountability era?

5. What is your overall knowledge of your performance/ accountability standards according to NCLB?

Probe: How did you become familiar with the additional expectations of your job performance?

6. Discuss your everyday activities/ operations under “high-stakes accountability.”

Probe: How do you manage your responsibilities?

7. In detail, please discuss the added pressures you now face as principal in an era of “high-stakes accountability.”

Probe: How do you handle the added pressures of your job mandates?

8. How do you develop your skills to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”

Probe: Was this system or intrinsically motivated?

9. What internal supports are provided to principal in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”

10. What external supports are to principals in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”

11. How would you improve principal preparation in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”

12. Are there any aspects of the experience that you would like to share that was not formulated in my questions?

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL WORKSHEET

**Sample Interview Protocol Worksheet**

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Participants' Responses</i>	<i>Additional notes</i>
Q1 Discuss your educational background, including your degrees, subjects taught, etc.		
Q2 What is your understanding of the role of principal in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”		
Q3 How do you perceive the status of the accountability movement as it relates to your job responsibilities?		
Q4 What do you consider your primary roles and responsibilities in the accountability era?		
Q5 What impact have the heightened expectations had on principals’ personal and professional lives?		
Q5 What is your overall knowledge of your performance/ accountability standards according to NCLB?		
Q6 Discuss your everyday activities/ operations under “high-stakes accountability.”		
Q7 . In detail, please discuss the added pressures you now face as principal in an era of “high-stakes accountability.”		
Q8 How do you develop your skills to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”		

<p>Q9 What internal supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”</p>		
<p>Q10 What external supports are provided to principals in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”</p>		
<p>Q11 How would you improve principal preparation in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”</p>		
<p>Q12 Are there any aspect of the experience that you would like to share that was not formulated in the questions asked?</p>		

APPENDIX G

BRACKETED EXPERIENCE/ PERSONAL INTEREST

## Personal Interest

Over the course of my 19-year career as an educator in Birmingham, I have held the positions of teacher/ coach, assistant principal, elementary, middle and high school principal, central office administrator, and a co-teacher in the Urban Teacher Enhancement Program (UTEP) at an area university. In every school I have been employed as the principal, it has faced State or Federal sanctions upon my entry. Within the last six years, I have been navigating the waters of the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 as a middle school principal. During the time, I found myself faced with the challenges and mandates of leading and guiding my school through Title I School-wide Improvement. I became keenly aware of the complexity and ambiguity of the role of principal and how it has grown and the focus shifted from management and supervision to one of instructional leadership and building capacity for shared leadership and implementing second order change.

In schools that have faced consistent failure overtime, there is almost a “defeated” culture which permeates the school environment. To meet the mandates of high-stakes accountability, a principal must be a catalyst for change, an innovator, motivator, communicator, instructional leader, entrepreneur, budget analyst, community/ consensus builder, and much more. Initially, I along with many of my colleagues found ourselves overwhelmed with the direction and the added accountability of NCLB to the principalship. Principals were now being faced with meeting a rigorous set of accountability standards without a clear understanding of the *new* job responsibilities and expectations, and in many cases without the preparation and training as well.



High-stakes accountability has reshaped the way I think about school leadership and how I go about conducting my daily business in order to ensure high student achievement and meet the mandates of NCLB.

APPENDIX H  
CODED TRANSCRIPT

## Coded Interview Transcript

I - Interviewer

Toni - Participant

Themes – Purple Text

Codes - Highlighted Gray

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am sincerely grateful for your willingness to share and express your thoughts. I will be asking you many questions and recording your responses verbatim. After the transcription of your thoughts and feelings, I will ask for your review of what I interpreted. It is important for the transcription to be verbatim so that I do not paraphrase something you've said with an incorrect interpretation.

What I am interested in finding out in this study is what it is like to be a principal in Alabama in an era of "high-stakes accountability." You've had a chance to review the questions I am going to ask you. Please express your thoughts and feelings as freely as you like. I really want to know your perspective concerning your experience in an era of "high-stakes accountability." I may ask you some additional questions that you have not reviewed as we go along in order to clarify for me what you mean.

I: Do you consent to have our interview to be tape recorded?

Toni: You have my consent....

I: Are you ready to start?

Toni: Yes, I am.

### **Interview Questions:**

I - Q1. Discuss your educational background, including your degrees, subjects taught, etc.

Toni: "Ok.... First of all, I have a BS Degree in elementary Education, a Masters in elementary , and..... K – 12 certification in administration. I have taught elementary grades, uh.... And just elementary grades, I have taught."

I - Probe: Where did you obtain you administration certification?

Toni: "University of Mobile."

I - Probe: How long have you been a principal?

Toni: "I have been a principal, I think about 18 years."

I - Probe: How long have you been the principal at your current school site?

Toni: "I have been at this school for 4 years. This is our 4<sup>th</sup> year opening this school, so I have been here for four years."

I - Probe: Would you say the major of your experience as a principal has been in a suburban, urban, or rural setting?

Toni: "Most time as a principals, I guess most of my time spent as a principal, I would have to say was spent in an urban school setting."

Q2. What is your understanding of the role of principal in an era of "high-stakes accountability?"

Toni: "I am being looked at as the instructional leader first (Roles and responsibilities) Uh...being there to make sure as far as what things need to be addressed in the classroom, in the school as far instruction is concerned...I would consider myself the instructional leader, making sure we are implementing the various programs we have in the system."

I - Probe: What are your tasks and responsibilities?

Toni: "As far as the instructional, being familiar with various programs that we are implementing as far as the local and the county, following through, just being aware of the programs, and making sure teachers are implementing those programs." (Roles and responsibilities)

I - Q3. How do you perceive the status of the accountability movement as it relates to your job responsibilities as principal?

Toni: "Well.... I like the idea of having teachers being held accountable for what is being taught. In fact, we are doing the professional learning communities this year (Collaboration). This is our first year doing that.... In where they now have a say so in what is being taught and....they have to documents that they are teaching those particular, .....say objectives or skills in that particular grade level. Making sure they document whatever they need to document and they are really held accountable for what is being taught in the classroom, and I think that's great (big smile)!"

I - Probe: What have been the major changes in your job responsibilities?

Toni: "The major change I would.... say....., right now, we are uh.... And ARI school and then we have all these different meetings, data meetings, walk-throughs, although we

do a lot of that for our evaluations (Roles and responsibilities – instructional leadership and monitoring)...but, now we are going into the classrooms looking for certain things as far as the ARI Program is concerned, and with the professional learning communities, too. I am doing a lot of observations in the classroom, making sure they are covering what they need to cover as far as our pacing guides, making sure they are completing whatever less they have to complete in a certain time, so they will be prepared for the standardized test that will be administered in the spring time. So, I guess...as far as my job now, I am doing a lot more visiting the classrooms now. I am doing a lot of curriculum monitoring now.”

I - Q4. What do you consider your primary roles and responsibilities in the accountability era?

Toni: “I would just have to say making sure the teachers do what they have to do, following through on whatever it is, that we have to implement as far as programs or whatever else it is. We are making sure the teachers are following through. That would be my main role as far as documentation, we are doing what we are suppose to be doing, we are documenting that we are teaching whatever needs to be taught and we are keeping records of whatever..., and checking with teachers to make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.” (Roles and responsibilities – monitoring instruction)

I - Q5. What is your overall knowledge of your performance/ accountability standards according to NCLB?

Toni: “No Child Left Behind (laughs).....Really I guess .....making sure that we are doing whatever is needed to make sure that the students are getting what they need to get in order to prepare them for the future. I guess my overall job would be making sure that this happens here on this campus.” (Commitment to student success – unwavering resolve)

I - Probe: How did you become familiar with the additional expectations of your job performance?

Toni: “We have various workshops, training, making sure we are doing what we are suppose to be doing as far as the instructional leaders, and what comes down from the State Department and what have you.....making sure we are following through on that.” (Professional growth and development – Internal and external)

I - Q6. Discuss your everyday activities/ operations under “high-stakes accountability.”

Toni: “Ok, as far as lesson plans, reviewing lesson plans, observation of classrooms, ..... checking.....the different programs, making sure we are doing what we need to be doing, uh....pacing guides.....what have you, .....everything I do on a regular basis, (Roles and responsibilities – monitoring) checking folders. I am checking lesson plans to make sure we are covering the curriculum guides to make sure we are doing what we need to be doing here at the school....on a regular basis. That’s everyday. The

paperwork is a lot, too! I must say that, getting things done and documented, making sure we cover everything that needs to be covered.”

I - Probe: How do you manage your responsibilities?

Toni: “How do I manage? I have to keep a record of everything I am doing. I keep my things organized in binders, making sure we are following through on what we need to be doing as far as the program, and targeting students that need additional assistance, making sure we have the necessary staff members and they are doing what they need to be doing. Like this year, we have a math coach on board. I brought that person on board because that’s an area we need to address here as far as the local school, so...I was able to get someone in that place. Right now, we are looking at special learning communities, making sure we are using common assessments.....and right now, she just left my office, so I know what we are doing. (Collaboration/ shared leadership). The teachers have to complete their forms. We had a professional development day on Friday and I went to each grade level to make sure they are doing what they need to be doing as far as professional learning communities. They have their common assessments, and they are making sure that the students that need additional assistance are getting it.”

I - Q7. In detail, please discuss the added pressures you now face as principal in an era of “high-stakes accountability.”

Toni: “The main thing is we were given a challenge. We want to make sure we meet the challenge that the State Department has given us. (Commitment to student success) I guess, making sure we are covering what we need to cover, making sure we have implemented the programs that they have mandated. ....Like AMSTII is coming down. That’s one program we are looking to bring aboard for next year. I guess the main thing is just making sure we are following through on whatever they have given us. And for us to stay abreast of the changes coming about, making sure my staff is aware of it so we won’t be left behind ourselves. We are staying abreast of the changes coming about on top of the various programs to meet the needs of those students that .....I don’t know (pauses)...would be left behind, making sure that we are doing everything in our power to make sure that doesn’t happen here.” (Demands of principalship – Threat of sanctions)

I - Probe: How do you handle the added pressures of your job mandates?

Toni: “Working with the students and the teachers making sure that they are not put under all that pressure. I let them know that we can do this as a team. We are all in this together and we are working together to achieve this goal (Collaboration/ shared leadership), as long as they know we are here to provide assistance to them if they need something, if they need more guidance as far as from staff at the Central Office, making sure we get those persons here if they have question about certain programs or about NCLB, our system has been good about providing training. (Professional growth and development – internal support) With that in mind.....so, I think the teachers feel good about the fact that they can ask their supervisor or they have other people out in

the field that they can contact and that's very important because we have a lot of questions and, unless we can get them answered, we are kind of left behind ourselves. So, I think the collaboration with the different groups, and even the schools, they work together to find out what's going on and I think that's going to be the key. (Collaboration/shared leadership – open communication). We're all in this together, we are going to have to do what we need to do to get it done."

I - Q8. How do you develop your skills to work in an era of "high-stakes accountability?"

Toni: "I guess we receive training and ..... from various workshops and on materials we received that we have to read about as far as what's going on about accountability (professional growth and development – Internal support), I guess.....uh.....well, I would say some of them, like the different programs we have brought on campus here, although we felt like ARI, we decided three years ago before the county mandated that, that we wanted to come on board. We wanted to get ahead of the game, making sure we were doing what we need to do, so that when other programs were brought before us, that we would be ready for different programs....because it's hard when you have two or three programs going on in one school year. There are schools in the county now trying to implement two program at a time and that's hard....! Like we are doing the professional learning communities this year. We are looking at two subjects. We are addressing writing and math. Next year, we will pick up maybe, science, and.....each year afterwards add on a new subject. The teachers can only handle just so much with everything they have to do and that's been a concern."

I - Probe: Was this system or intrinsically motivated?

Toni: "Our system really does a great job providing training. However, as a principal, you have to have a desire to stay informed of what going on than the changes that are taking place..... so I say both." (Professional growth and development – intrinsic and extrinsic motivation)

I - Q9. What internal support does principals received in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of "high-stakes accountability?"

Toni: "They (Central Office) provide training, various workshops. We have had a lot of workshops scheduled, for not only the teachers, but office and staff members here (Professional growth and development – internal support). That's a plus about our district.....It provides the training we need. I can also say even custodian training. We really provide all the people employed in the county, para-educators are all involved now. It's not just like the teachers are going to workshops. They have included workshops for all staff members now."

I - Q10. What external support does principals received in acquiring and developing the performance skills necessary to work in an era of "high-stakes accountability?"

Toni: "External, like what? You're talking about out of the system."

I: Yes, I am referring to any supports you receive that do not come from within your school or school system.

Toni: “Outside the district....whenever we need to contact the State department for assistance, we can always pick up the phone or email someone at the State Department. They are very helpful. (Professional growth and development – external support) I’ve done that on numerous occasions to contact them and get some clarification there. I feel like if I need something, I can always contact them and they will be willing to assist me.”

I - Q11. How would you improve principal preparation in an era of “high-stakes accountability?”

Toni: “As far as improving here?”

I: Principal preparation for perspective principals.....

Toni: “Need more hours in a day (Demands of principalship – Increased responsibilities). I guess that’s impossible....I should say. You can’t get more hours in the day. Improvements.....as far NCLB, as far as principals making sure we have everything we need to get the job done, no not right now. I think we have quite a bit going on and we are on the right track now. We just have to get in there full speed ahead.”

I - Q12. Are there any aspect of the leadership experience that you would like to share that were not formulated in my questions?

I - Toni: “All I can say is that things have changed (laughs). I have been in education for over 34 years. From the time I entered as far as administration, I can see we are still doing a lot of paperwork now trying to get the job done....but then again we have a lot more to do because of the students. (Demands of NCLB – Increased responsibilities) I think the NCLB Act....I think that’s wonderful because we want students performing at grade level. I can see a difference now because even with my students who have been in the programs for three years with ARI, I can see a difference. I think if we continue on this path, we will not have any children left behind, I think? I can see a difference because even our test results indicate that NCLB is working because we are getting the programs we need for our children to be successful.”

This concludes my interview. I would like to take the opportunity again to say thank you for your willingness to participate in my doctoral study. The information you providing will be valuable as I try to understand what meaning do principals in Alabama make of their administrative roles and experiences in an era of high-stakes accountability.



APPENDIX I  
QSR N6 TREE NODES

QSR N6 Full version, revision 6.0.  
Licensee: Unregistered.

PROJECT: Chuck's Project Copy, User Chuck, 8:03 pm, Feb 6, 2009.

REPORT ON NODES FROM Tree Nodes '~/'

Depth: ALL

Restriction on coding data: NONE

- (1) /Administrative Roles and Responsibilities
- (1 1) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Instructional Leadership
- (1 2) / Administrative Role and Responsibilities/PD and Support
- (1 3) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Monitoring
- (1 4) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Management Responsibilities
- (1 5) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Motivation
- (1 6) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Safety and Security
- (1 7) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Teacher Evaluations
- (1 8) /Administrative Role and Responsibilities/Test Accountability
- (2) /Collaboration/ Shared Leadership
- (2 1) /Collaboration/Shared Leadership/ Shared Vision
- (2 2) /Collaboration/Shared Leadership/Delegation of Responsibilities
- (2 3) / Collaboration/Shared Leadership /Teaming
- (3) /Commitment to Student Success
- (3 1) /Commitment to Student Success/Unwavering Resolve
- (3 2) / Commitment to Student Success/ Determination
- (3 3) / Commitment to Student Success/ Focused and Passionate
- (4) /Professional Growth and Development
- (4 1) / Professional Growth and Development/Benefits
- (4 2) / Professional Growth and Development/Intrinsic Motivation
- (4 3) / Professional Growth and Development/Extrinsic Motivation
- (4 4) / Professional Growth and Development/Internal Supports
- (4 5) / Professional Growth and Development/External Supports
- (4 6) / Professional Growth and Development/Professional Organizations
- (5) /Demands of the Principalship
- (5 1) / Demands of the Principalship/ Multi-faceted and Complex
- (5 2) / Demands of the Principalship/Increased Responsibilities
- (5 3) / Demands of the Principalship/Threats
- (5 4) / Demands of the Principalship/Anxiety and Stress
- (5 5) / Demands of the Principalship/Professional Affects
- (68) /Quotes

APPENDIX J  
ISLLC STANDARDS

## ISLLC's Standards for School Leaders

1. 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.
2. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth.
3. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, and mobilizing community resources.
5. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

APPENDIX K

ALABAMA STANDARDS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

## Alabama Standards for Instructional Leaders

To realize the mission of enhancing school leadership among principals and administrators in Alabama resulting in improved academic achievement for all students, instructional leaders will be held to the following standards:

### **Standard 1: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need to prepare instructional leaders who value and are committed to educating all students to become successful adults. Each instructional leader is responsible for creating and articulating a vision of high expectations for learning within the school or district that can be shared by all employees and is supported by the broader school-community of parents and citizens. This requires that instructional leaders are willing to examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and practices; understand and apply research; and foster a culture of continuous improvement among all members of the educational staff. Such instructional leaders will commit themselves to high levels of personal and organizational performance in order to ensure implementation of this vision of learning.

### **Standard 1: Planning for Continuous Improvement**

Engages the school community in developing and maintaining a shared vision; plans effectively; uses critical thinking and problem-solving techniques; collects, analyzes, and interprets data; allocates resources; and evaluates results for the purpose of continuous school improvement.

### **Standard 1: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge to lead the articulation, development, and implementation of a shared vision and strategic plan for the school that places student and faculty learning at the center;
2. Ability to lead and motivate staff, students, and families to achieve the school's vision;
3. Knowledge to align instructional objectives and curricular goals with the shared vision;
4. Knowledge to allocate and guard instruction time for the achievement of goals;
5. Ability to work with faculty to identify instructional and curricular needs that align with vision and resources;
6. Ability to interact with the community concerning the school's vision, mission, and priorities;
7. Ability to work with staff and others to establish and accomplish goals;
8. Ability to relate the vision, mission, and goals to the instructional needs of students;
9. Ability to use goals to manage activities;
7. Ability to use a variety of problem-solving techniques and decision-making skills to resolve problems;
8. Ability to delegate tasks clearly and appropriately to accomplish organizational goals;
9. Ability to focus upon student learning as a driving force for curriculum,

- instruction, and institutional decision-making;
10. Ability to use a process for gathering information to use when making decisions;
  11. Knowledge to create a school leadership team that is skillful in using data;
  12. Ability to use multiple sources of data to manage the accountability process;
  13. Ability to assess student progress using a variety of techniques and information;
  14. Ability to monitor and assess instructional programs, activities, and materials;
  15. Knowledge to use approved methods and principles of program evaluation in the school improvement process;
  16. Ability to use diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and apply instructional improvement;
  17. Ability to use external resources as sources for ideas for improving student achievement;

### **Standard 2: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need for instructional leaders to establish teaching and learning as the focal point of schools. It accepts the proposition that all students can learn given enough high-quality instruction, and that student learning is the fundamental purpose of schools. To this end, instructional leaders are responsible for ensuring that decisions about curriculum, instructional strategies (including instructional technology), assessment, and professional development are based on sound research, best practices, school and district data, and other contextual information and that observation and collaboration are used to design meaningful and effective experiences that improve student achievement. Successful instructional leaders must be able to identify, clarify, and address barriers to student learning and communicate the importance of developing learning strategies for diverse populations. In addition, this standard requires that instructional leaders are learners who model and encourage life-long learning. They should establish a culture of high expectations for themselves, their students, and their staff.

### **Standard 2: Teaching and Learning**

Promotes and monitors the success of all students in the learning environment by collaboratively aligning the curriculum; by aligning the instruction and the assessment processes to ensure effective student achievement; and by using a variety of benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability.

### **Standard 2: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge to plan for the achievement of annual learning gains, school improvement goals, and other targets related to the shared vision
2. Ability to use multiple sources of data to plan and assess instructional improvement
3. Ability to engage staff in ongoing study and implementation of research-based practices
4. Ability to use the latest research, applied theory, and best practices to make curricular and instructional decisions
5. Ability to communicate high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of students

6. Ability to ensure that content and instruction are aligned with high standards resulting in improved student achievement
7. Ability to coach staff and teachers on the evaluation of student performance
8. Ability to identify differentiated instructional strategies to meet the needs of a variety of student populations
9. Ability to develop curriculum aligned to state standards
10. Knowledge to collaborate with community, staff, district, state, and university personnel to develop the instructional program
11. Knowledge to align curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments to district, state, and national standards
12. Ability to focus upon student learning as a driving force for curriculum, instruction, and instructional decision-making
13. Ability to use multiple sources of data to manage the accountability process
14. Ability to assess student progress using a variety of formal and informal assessments
15. Ability to monitor and assess instructional programs, activities, and materials
16. Ability to use the methods and principles of program evaluation in the school improvement process

### **Standard 3: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need for instructional leaders to recognize quality professional development as the key strategy for supporting significant improvements. Instructional leaders are able to articulate the critical link between improved student learning and the professional learning of teachers. Skillful instructional leaders establish policies and organizational structures that support ongoing professional learning and continuous improvement. They ensure an equitable distribution of resources to accomplish school goals and continuously improve the school's work through the ongoing evaluation of staff development's effectiveness in achieving student learning goals. They make certain that employee annual calendars and daily schedules provide adequate time for learning and collaboration as part of the workday. Instructional leaders also distribute leadership responsibilities among teachers and other employees. Distributed leadership enables teachers to develop and use their talents as members or chairs of school improvement committees, trainers, coaches, mentors, and members of peer review panels. These leaders make certain that their colleagues have the necessary knowledge, skills, and other forms of support that ensure success in these new roles.

### **Standard 3: Human Resources Development**

Recruits, selects, organizes, evaluates, and mentors faculty and staff to accomplish school and system goals. Works collaboratively with the school faculty and staff to plan and implement effective professional development that is based upon student needs and that promotes both individual and organizational growth and leads to improved teaching and learning. Initiates and nurtures interpersonal relationships to facilitate teamwork and enhance student achievement.

### **Standard 3: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge to set high expectations and standards for the performance of all



- teachers and staff
2. Ability to coach staff and teachers on the evaluation of student performances
  3. Ability to work collaboratively with teachers to plan for individual professional development
  4. Ability to use a variety of supervisory models to improve teaching and learning
  5. Ability to apply adult learning strategies to professional development
  6. Knowledge to use the accepted methods and principles of personnel evaluation
  7. Knowledge to operate within the provisions of each contract as well as established enforcement and grievance procedures
  8. Ability to establish mentor programs to orient new teachers and provide ongoing coaching and other forms of support for veteran staff
  9. Ability to manage, monitor, and evaluate a program of continuous professional development tied to student learning and other school goals
  10. Knowledge to hire and retain high-quality teachers and staff
  11. Ability to provide high-quality professional development activities to ensure that teachers have skills to engage all students in active learning
  12. Ability to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect, plan, and work collaboratively
  13. Ability to create a community of learners among faculty and staff
  14. Ability to create a personal professional development plan for his/her own continuous improvement
  15. Ability to foster development of aspiring leaders, including teacher leaders

#### **Standard 4: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need for instructional leaders to understand and be able to operate within the larger context of community and beyond, which affects opportunities for all students. Instructional leaders must respond to and influence this larger political, social, economic, and cultural context. Of vital importance is the ability to develop a continuing dialogue with economic and political decision-makers concerning the role of schools and to build collaborative relationships that support improved social and educational opportunities for all children. Instructional leaders must be able to participate actively in the political and policy-making context in the service of education, including proactive use of the legal system to protect students' rights and improve opportunities for all students.

#### **Standard 4: Diversity**

Responds to and influences the larger personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context in the classroom, school, and the local community while addressing diverse student needs to ensure the success of all students.

#### **Standard 4: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge to involve school community in appropriate diversity policy implementations, program planning, and assessment efforts
2. Ability to conform to legal and ethical standards related to diversity
3. Ability to perceive the needs and concerns of others and is able to deal tactfully with them

4. Knowledge to handle crisis communications in both oral and written form
5. Ability to arrange for students and families whose home language is not English to engage in school activities and communication through oral and written translations
6. Knowledge to recruit, hire, develop, and retain a diverse staff
7. Knowledge to represent the school and the educational establishment in relations with various cultural, ethnic, racial, and special interest groups in the community
8. Knowledge to recognize and respond effectively to multicultural and ethnic needs in the organization and the community
9. Ability to interact effectively with diverse individuals and groups using a variety of interpersonal skills in any given situation
10. Ability to promote and monitor the delivery of instructional content that provides for diverse perspectives appropriate to the situation

### **Standard 5: Rationale**

This standard addresses the fact that cooperation among schools, the district, parents, and the larger community is essential to the success of instructional leaders and students. Instructional leaders must see schools as an integral part of the larger community. Collaboration and communication with families, businesses, governmental agencies, social service organizations, the media, and higher education institutions are critical to effective schooling. Effective and appropriate communications, coupled with the involvement of families and other stakeholders in decisions, help to ensure continued community support for schools. Instructional leaders must see families as partners in the education of their youngsters and believe that families have the best interest of their children in mind. Instructional leaders must involve families in decisions at the school and district levels. Family and student issues that negatively affect student learning must be addressed through collaboration with community agencies that can integrate health, social, and other services. Such collaboration relies on good relationships with community leaders and outreach to a wide array of business, religious, political, and service agencies. Providing leadership to programs serving all students, including those with special and exceptional needs, further communicates to internal and external audiences the importance of diversity. To work with all elements of the community, instructional leaders must recognize, value, and communicate effectively with various cultural, ethnic, racial, and special interest groups. Modeling community collaboration for staff and then offering opportunities for staff to develop collaborative skills maximizes positive interactions between schools and the community.

### **Standard 5: Community and Stakeholder Relationships**

Identifies the unique characteristics of the community to create and sustain mutually supportive family-school-community relations

### **Standard 5: Key Indicators**

1. Ability to address student and family conditions affecting learning
2. Ability to identify community leaders and their relationships to school goals and programs
3. Ability to communicate the school's vision, mission, and priorities to the

- community
4. Knowledge to serve as primary school spokesperson in the community
  5. Ability to share leadership and decision-making with others by gathering input
  6. Ability to seek resources of families, business, and community members in support of the school's goals
  7. Ability to develop partnerships, coalitions, and networks to impact student achievement
  8. Ability to actively engage the community to share responsibility for student and school success
  9. Ability to involve family and community in appropriate policy implementation, program planning, and assessment efforts
  10. Knowledge to make parents partners in their student's education

### **Standard 6: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need for effective leadership for technology in schools. An underlying assumption of this standard is that instructional leaders should be competent users of information and technology tools common to information-age professionals. The effective educational leader should be a hands-on user of technology. While technology empowers instructional leaders by the information it can readily produce and communicates, it exponentially empowers the instructional leader who masters the tools and processes that allow creative and dynamic management of available information. Instructional leaders who recognize the potential of technology understand that leadership has a responsibility to ensure technological equity. They must also know that technology can unlock tremendous potential in learners and staff with special and diverse needs.

### **Standard 6: Technology**

Plans, implements, and evaluates the effective integration of current technologies and electronic tools in teaching, management, research, and communication.

### **Standard 6: Key Indicators**

1. Ability to implement a plan for the use of technology, telecommunications, and information systems to enrich curriculum, instruction, and assessment
2. Ability to develop a plan for technology integration for the school community
3. Knowledge to discover practical approaches for developing and implementing successful technology planning
4. Ability to model the use of technology for personal and professional productivity
5. Ability to develop an effective teacher professional development plan to increase technology usage to support curriculum-based integration practices
6. Ability to promote the effective integration of technology throughout the teaching and learning environment
7. Knowledge to increase access to educational technologies for the school
8. Ability to provide support for teachers to increase the use of technology already in the school/classrooms
9. Ability to use technology to support the analysis and use of student assessment data

**Standard 7: Rationale**

This standard addresses the need to enhance student learning through effective, efficient, and equitable utilization of resources. Instructional leaders must use their knowledge of organizations to create a learning environment conducive to the success of all students. Proper allocation of resources such as personnel, facilities, and technology is essential to creating an effective learning environment. Resource management decisions should give priority to teaching, student achievement, and student development. Also, operational procedures and policies must be established to maintain school safety and security and to strengthen the academic environment. All management decisions, including those regarding human resources, fiscal operations, facilities, legal issues, time management, scheduling, technology, and equipment, should be based on sound organizational practice. Instructional leaders must monitor and evaluate operational systems to ensure that they enhance student learning and reflect the school's and district's accountability to the community. They also actively seek additional sources of financial, human, and physical support. They involve stakeholders to ensure the management and operational decisions take into consideration the needs of multiple constituencies while at the same time focusing the entire community on student achievement as the ultimate goal. To include stakeholders in management decisions, instructional leaders must be competent in conflict resolution, consensus-building, group processes, and effective communication.

**Standard 7: Management of the Learning Organization**

Manages the organization, facilities, and financial resources; implements operational plans; and promotes collaboration to create a safe and effective learning environment.

**Standard 7: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge to develop and administer policies that provide a safe school environment
2. Ability to apply operational plans and processes to accomplish strategic goals
3. Ability to attend to student learning goals in the daily operation of the school
4. Knowledge to identify and analyze the major sources of fiscal and nonfiscal resources for the school including business and community resources
5. Knowledge to build and ability to support a culture of learning at the school
6. Knowledge to manage financial and material assets and capital goods and services in order to allocate resources according to school priorities
7. Knowledge to use an efficient budget planning process that involves staff and community
8. Ability to identify and organize resources to achieve curricular and instructional goals
9. Ability to develop techniques and organizational skills necessary to lead/manage a complex and diverse organization
10. Ability to plan and schedule one's own and others' work so that resources are used appropriately in meeting priorities and goals
11. Ability to use goals to manage activities
12. Knowledge to create and ability to empower a school leadership team that shares responsibility for the management of the learning organization

**Standard 8: Rationale**

This standard addresses the educational leader's role as the "first citizen" of the school/district community. Instructional leaders should set the tone for how employees and students interact with one another and with members of the school, district, and larger community. The leader's contacts with students, parents, and employees must reflect concern for others as well as for the organization and the position. Instructional leaders must develop the ability to examine personal and professional values that reflect a code of ethics. They must be able to serve as role models, accepting responsibility for using their position ethically and constructively on behalf of the school/district community.

**Standard 8: Ethics**

Demonstrates honesty, integrity, and fairness to guide school policies and practices consistent with current legal and ethical standards for professional educators.

**Standard 8: Key Indicators**

1. Knowledge and ability to adhere to a professional code of ethics and values
2. Knowledge and ability to make decisions based on the legal, moral, and ethical implications of policy options and political strategies
3. Knowledge and ability to develop well-reasoned educational beliefs based upon an understanding of teaching and learning
4. Knowledge to understand ethical and legal concerns educators face when using technology throughout the teaching and learning environment
5. Knowledge and ability to develop a personal code of ethics embracing diversity, integrity, and the dignity of all people
6. Knowledge and ability to act in accordance with federal and state constitutional provisions, statutory standards, and regulatory applications
7. Ability to make decisions within an ethical context