

SUPERINTENDENTS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND THE  
ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH  
LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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## ABSTRACT

### SUPERINTENDENTS' INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

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The purpose of this study was to discover if there was a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of their students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and students with disabilities (SWDs) as measured by the percent of students who were proficient in reading and mathematics on the North Carolina End-of-Grade assessments. The superintendents' instructional leadership practices were assessed in five areas of superintendent leadership responsibilities as described by Waters and Marzano (2006) whose work was also used as the foundation for the new North Carolina Superintendents Standards. This study concluded that the self-reported instructional leadership behaviors of North Carolina superintendents did not have a significant relationship with the performance of their students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities.

The qualitative data analyzed from the open-ended survey responses provided insight into the practices and programs to which superintendents attributed their success

in meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standards with students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. Two promising program models were identified in the districts with the highest student achievement: Responsiveness to Instruction (RTI) and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). This information was also compared to responses from superintendents who had the lowest performance with these groups of students. Superintendents from the lowest performing districts identified different programs than those in the districts with the highest performance. Further, superintendents identified challenges their districts have incurred in meeting AYP with these groups of students. The challenges most frequently cited by superintendents were: (1) the lack of funding for additional personnel and materials to meet the diverse needs of these populations; (2) the lack of high expectations for SWDs and LEP students; (3) the lack of ownership of the achievement of SWDs by regular education teachers; and (4) the lack of sustained professional development for teachers.



## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 is viewed by many as extremely comprehensive legislation focusing on diminishing or eradicating achievement gaps (Sherman, 2008), something most lay persons and educators would tend to agree is a positive goal worthy of attaining. Nevertheless, nearly 59% of the superintendents in the nation rate the NCLB Act of 2001 as having a negative impact on education (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While most superintendents agree with the overall goal of NCLB, many of the concerns expressed by superintendents surround the assessment of students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency (Sherman, 2008).

Understandably, the NCLB Act of 2001 has forced superintendents to heighten their knowledge of instructional strategies and to become more diligent users of data to guide their decision-making (Lashway, 2002). However, Marlatt (2004) concluded that superintendents reported that a motivating factor prompting them to become instructional leaders was not their desire to boast strong test scores, but to have a positive impact on student learning and consequently to improve students' chances at having successful lives. Another prevailing factor was their desire to make positive changes in the district as measured by enhanced achievement for all students.

Since the superintendent is the chief executive officer of the organization, all aspects of the district, from facilities to instruction, are the superintendent's responsibility. If anything goes wrong with any aspect of the organization, the responsibility stops on the superintendent's desk (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). In 2006, 49.2% of superintendents across the nation reported that the primary reason their

school boards hired them was to be instructional leaders (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). However, in terms of student accountability, nationally only 6.7% of the superintendents' contracts are tied to performance-based measures (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

### *Rationale*

Under current North Carolina and NCLB accountability models, all students with disabilities must be assessed with an appropriate state assessment as determined by the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and all limited English proficient students must be assessed if they have been in U.S. schools longer than one year. Furthermore, under the federal accountability model, the adequate yearly progress (AYP) performance targets for students are increased every three years so that by 2014, 100% of all groups of students, including students with disabilities (SWDs) and those with limited English proficiency (LEP), will perform at state proficiency standards (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2008c).

School districts are held accountable for the performance of all students in the district and all groups of students if there are 40 or more students in a grade span from each group. The groups are: (1) all students, (2) White, (3) Black, (4) Hispanic, (5) Native American, (6) Asian, (7) Multiracial, (8) economically disadvantaged students, (9) students with limited English proficiency, and (10) students with disabilities (NCDPI, 2009d). Thus, each student is counted in at least two groups; all students and the student's racial group, and some students may be counted in more than two groups. Further, at least 95% of each group of students must participate in the state testing program in reading and mathematics. NCLB is an all or nothing accountability model, meaning that a district must meet all AYP targets in reading and mathematics with all

groups of students in order to remain out of federal sanctions (NCDPI, 2008a). AYP targets represent the percent of students that must score at proficiency on the state assessments within a given year. AYP targets remain the same for three years and then incrementally increase so that by 2014, 100% of students are proficient on state standards. The AYP targets are set by each state and approved by the U.S. Department of Education (NCDPI, 2008a).

Historically, there have been few school districts in North Carolina in which students with LEP and SWDs are meeting the AYP targets or making progress toward meeting AYP targets in both reading and mathematics. From the North Carolina District Report Cards of 2007-08, there were only two school districts in North Carolina in which students in *both* groups met the AYP performance targets in *both* reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. Of the 87 school districts that had a group of students with LEP in grades 3-8, 30 districts (34%) met AYP targets for their students with LEP in both reading and mathematics. In addition, of the 114 school districts that had a SWDs group in grades 3-8, seven districts (6%) met AYP targets for their SWDs in both reading and mathematics (NCDPI, 2008b). With these dismal performance results, there clearly appears to be a need to discover ways to increase the performance of students in these two groups.

Controversy from both the educational community and parents surrounds the assessment of and participation of students with LEP and SWDs in high stakes assessments. On one side of the argument is the belief that by not including students with LEP and SWDs in high stakes assessments sends the message that these children do not matter, thus translating to substandard educational opportunities for them (Cole, 2006;

Thurlow, Quenemoen, Altman, & Cuthbert, 2008). However, some superintendents reported that many times these students become scapegoats for the school's low performance under NCLB (Cole 2006; Sherman, 2008). Further, some superintendents reported they had received more pressure from general education teachers to pull these students out of the general curriculum since the start of the NCLB requirement of assessing all students (Sherman 2008).

Much has been written about leadership practices of school building principals and their impact on student achievement. Prior to the late 1980s, little research was conducted regarding the leadership practices of superintendents and their impact on student achievement (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008). In 2006, Waters and Marzano published their meta-analysis that identified specific instructional leadership responsibilities of superintendents that impact student achievement. Unfortunately, in a quest to determine how to increase the specific performance of SWDs and students with LEP, no studies could be found that examined the instructional leadership practices of superintendents that affect student achievement of students with SWDs and only one study could be found that examined commonalities of school districts that have been successful with the achievement of students with LEP.

#### *Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to discover if there existed a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of their students with LEP and SWDs, as measured by state assessments.

### *Research Questions*

The research questions for the study are:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with limited English proficiency?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with limited English proficiency?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with disabilities?
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with disabilities?

Thus, the null hypotheses for the study are:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with limited English proficiency.
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with limited English proficiency.

3. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with disabilities.
4. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with disabilities.

### *Significance of the Study*

#### *Implications*

Currently, school districts across North Carolina are struggling to meet the AYP benchmarks with students with disabilities and limited English proficient students. These appear to be two of the most challenging subgroups as defined by NCLB. In addition, there is research that demonstrates the impact of certain instructional leadership practices of superintendents on overall student performance; yet no research could be found that shows the impact of certain instructional leadership practices of superintendents on the performance of students in these two subgroups.

#### *Applications*

The current study provided information on specific programs and practices that superintendents participating in the study identified as having a positive impact on the reading and mathematics achievement of their SWDs and their students with LEP. This information might be useful for practicing superintendents as they evaluate programs and practices to meet the instructional needs of their SWDs and students with LEP. Further, information gleaned from the study might be useful for institutions of higher learning that offer superintendent licensure programs.

### *Limitations*

While a more accurate snapshot of superintendents' actual practices could be garnered by sampling district staff and principals in each school district, for the purpose of this study, the sample was only those superintendents in North Carolina who respond to a five-point Likert-scale survey. Thus, there are possible issues with social desirability tendencies in self-reported items as respondents may have reported answers they believed were desirable or favorable. There are also possible errors associated with answers respondents provide in survey research. Fowler (2009) proposed that sometimes these errors may be a result of the respondent misunderstanding the question, or not having enough information or knowledge to report a true answer. During the survey pilot test, respondents were asked to identify ambiguous and unclear survey questions and adjustments were made to those survey questions.

The survey validation phase also contained limitations as four Western Carolina University faculty from the Educational Leadership and Foundations department were asked to categorize the survey items into one of five identified superintendent's responsibilities from the research of Waters and Marzano (2006). The four validators made the same groupings as Marzano and Waters did 50% of the time, but on the other 50% of items, only half of the validators agreed with the groupings.

Limitations of survey research were taken into consideration during the data collection and analysis phase. Attempts to reach the target response rate took place during the data collection process. During the analysis phase, adjustments were made due to the lack of variability in the superintendents' responses and after a factor analysis of the actual survey responses was conducted, it was determined that the survey responses did

not, clearly correspond to the five identified areas of the theoretical framework. Thus, the survey responses were summed across all areas for the statistical analyses. This study is also limited as it examined student achievement data from only one school year.

### *Definitions*

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used.

AYP Benchmarks: “Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures the yearly progress of different groups of students at the school, district, and state levels against yearly targets in reading/language arts and mathematics” (NCDPI, n.d., ¶ 1). The AYP benchmarks are set by the state and approved by the federal government and change incrementally every three years so that by 2014, all groups of students must meet proficiency standards (NCDPI, 2008a).

Meeting AYP: Districts can meet AYP in one of four ways: (1) All groups of students of 40 or more meet the proficiency benchmark and at least 95% of the students in each group participate in the state testing program. (2) There is a safe harbor provision which allows districts to meet AYP with a group of students if 10 percent fewer students in the group are below grade level from the previous year. (3) A confidence interval provision is also allowed which provides a range of upper and lower values that are likely to contain the actual population percent proficient (Creswell, 2005). (4) Finally, there is a growth provision which encompasses a formula that outlines the predetermined incremental progress that nonproficient students must demonstrate in order to become proficient within four years (NCDPI, 2008a).

North Carolina End-of-Grade assessments: Standardized, summative assessments including all approved alternative assessments in reading and mathematics that are



administered to all North Carolina students at the end of each year in grades three through eight. These assessments are designed to determine student mastery or proficiency of the North Carolina curriculum (NCDPI, 2008c).

Students with disabilities (SWDs): A student who has at least one documented disability who because of that disability requires special education and related services (Education of Students with Disabilities, 2007).

Students with limited English proficiency (LEP): Students who have been in U.S. schools for more than one year, whose primary language is not English, and who have not scored superior in all four domains of the English language proficiency assessment (NCDPI, 2009f).

Superintendents' instructional leadership practices: Those superintendent responsibilities or initiatives that Waters and Marzano (2006) found to have a statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlation to average student academic achievement. Those responsibilities are: (1) ensuring a collaborative goal setting process, (2) establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (3) creating board alignment with and support of district goals, (4) monitoring achievement and instruction goals, and (5) allocating resources to support goals for achievement and instruction (p.11).

School districts across North Carolina are grappling with the issues surrounding NCLB, in particular, the requirement for all groups of students to meet the AYP benchmarks. This requirement has proven to be especially challenging for SWDs and students with LEP. There is meta-analysis research that demonstrates the association between certain instructional leadership practices of superintendents and student performance. The current study seeks to determine if these identified instructional

leadership practices have any association to the performance of SWDs and students with LEP.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review encompasses a summary of issues surrounding participation of SWDs and students with LEP in high-stakes assessments, and a brief historical perspective of the evolving roles for superintendents. The next section includes the identification of the theoretical framework with explanations and examples from research to support each correlate of the framework. The literature review concludes with a discussion of advancing equity for all students, and a discussion of other variables that may affect student achievement.

### *Meeting the Challenge of NCLB with Specific Groups of Students*

While there are many issues with meeting NCLB requirements for minority students and students in poverty, addressing AYP standards for students with LEP and SWDs presents unique challenges for school districts. These students have language barriers and learning barriers that make content mastery and the assessment of content mastery complex and multifaceted.

### *Students with Disabilities*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) contained numerous provisions that aligned IDEA requirements with NCLB requirements. Not only are all SWDs required to participate in state assessment programs, but also IDEA 2004 required that districts and schools publically report the participation rates and disaggregated performance data for SWDs on all assessments. Further, IDEA 2004 required states to set annual performance goals for SWDs that are the same as the state's AYP goals for all students and also required that states develop appropriate alternate

assessments for SWDs that are aligned to state content standards (Office of Special Education Programs, 2007).

Cole (2006) reported that since the onset of NCLB, schools across the nation have made gains in the student achievement of SWDs; yet, the overall performance of this group of students is still woefully low in comparison to students not identified as disabled. Many parents and special education advocates are supportive of the NCLB Act and celebrate that students with disabilities are a part of the federal accountability model so that someone must now be accountable for the performance of SWDs. Further, the NCLB Act tends to be supportive of the inclusion of special education children in the general education curriculum and its classrooms.

Landau, Vohs, and Romano (n.d.) argued that excluding SWDs from state assessments indicates that the performance and progress of those students are not important. The researchers further proposed that all students, even SWDs, should be expected to achieve at higher levels. Moreover, when holding schools and school districts accountable for the performance of all students, more SWDs will be granted access to the general curriculum and schools will be forced to implement appropriate accommodations in order to ensure mastery of higher standards. While the report advocated that the same tests as other students take may not be appropriate for all SWDs, it also supported the fact that SWDs should be given the same opportunity as other students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

The NCLB requirement of including all SWDs in state assessment programs is based on the belief that instruction will be improved for SWDs and, consequently, student learning will improve (Yesseldyke, et al., 2004). In a multiple methods study,

Ysseldyke, Dennison, and Nelson (2003) concluded that many states, including North Carolina, are showing increases in the performance of students with disabilities because of the requirement that SWDs be included in state assessment programs. While critics of high stakes testing of SWDs proclaimed that there are unintended consequences, such as higher retention rates and higher dropout rates, Yesseldyke, et al., (2004) argued that there is no empirical evidence that indicates these consequences actually exist.

In a 2003 study published by the National Center of Education Outcomes, special education directors from all 50 states across the nation, in general, identified more positive than negative consequences for including SWDs in state assessments and accountability programs. However, district staff noted that the negative outcome of including SWDs in state assessments is that they cannot achieve at the state proficient level, which translates into SWDs making schools appear less effective (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003). In a 2008 report, national four-year trend data were collected from states to monitor the progress of SWDs on state assessments. Only a little over half the states had performance data for SWDs over this time span. However, using the available data, moderate increases were found in the average percentage of SWDs meeting state proficiency standards in both reading and mathematics in elementary and middle school. Unfortunately, the trend data showed lower percentages of high school SWDs scoring at state proficiency levels (Thurlow, Quenemoen, Altman, & Cuthbert, 2008).

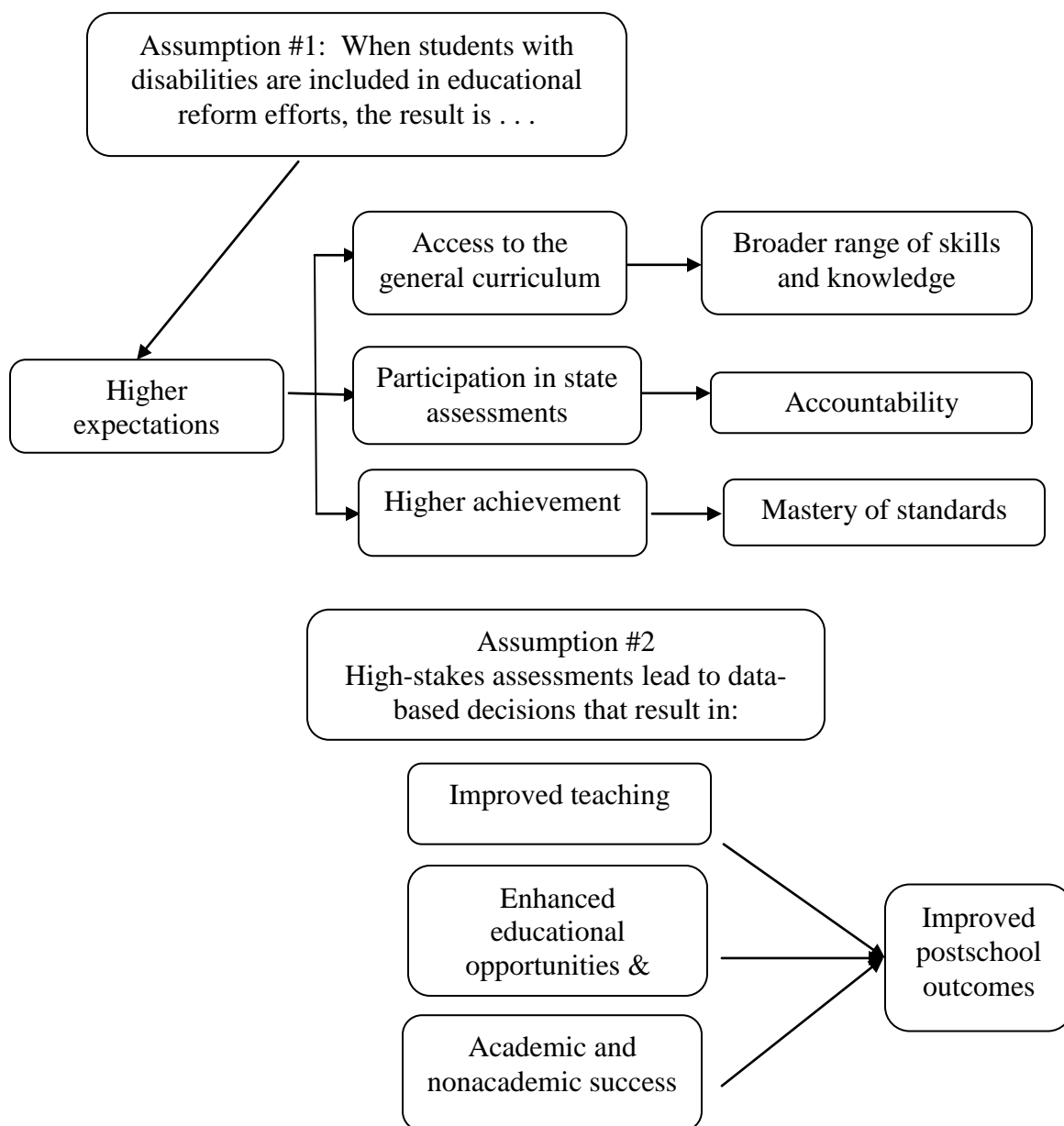
Defur (2002) proposed that including SWDs in state assessments results not only in higher expectations for learning and improved student performance, but also SWDs will experience increased access to the general curriculum, improved teaching, and consequently improved and more varied opportunities and experiences which will yield

better post-graduation outcomes. Defur conceptualized these assumptions as shown in Figure 1.

Defur's study surveyed Virginia district-level exceptional children administrators' perceptions of the benefits of including SWDs in state assessments and revealed that 73% of directors reported that the most significant benefit was that more SWDs were granted access to the general curriculum. While only 15% of district administrators reported improved student performance, over 80% reported that there were more positive than negative benefits to including SWDs in state assessments. In addition, at the time of the study, the increased expectations for performance had not negatively affected graduation rates for SWDs. However, the study revealed unintended consequences of including SWDs in state assessments. Ninety-four percent of district administrators reported an increased referral rate of students for special education services. Further, 67% of administrators reported that school staff were exhibiting increased resentment at having SWDs included in the state assessment program as the performance of these students many times resulted in school sanctions. Finally, the study revealed little to no evidence that the quality of instruction in general education classes improved.

Increases in achievement of SWDs were also confirmed in a five-year study of reading scores of 461 SWDs in one North Carolina school district (Schulte, Villwock, Wichard, & Stallings, 2001). The study concluded that 21.5% more SWDs scored at state reading proficiency standards over the five-year span of the study. This increase in performance occurred during the same time that the participation rate of SWDs included in the state testing program increased from 85% to 96%. However, the percent of SWDs

Figure 1. Defur's (2002) conceptual framework depicting assumptions for the benefit of including SWDs in high stakes assessments.



Note. From "Education Reform, High-Stakes Assessment, and Students with Disabilities," by S. H. Defur, 2002, *Remedial and Special Education*, 23, p. 205. Reprinted with permission of author (Appendix A).

scoring proficient on state assessments was still sadly below that of other students, with 87.8% of all students scoring at state reading proficiency standards compared to 60.5% of SWDs scoring at state reading proficiency standards.

Holding high expectations for the performance of SWDs is a premise embedded in NCLB. In a qualitative study, Nagle, Yunker, and Malmgren (2006) described the findings of key personnel from eight school districts throughout four different states on their perception of the NCLB requirement for SWDs. One finding that emerged was that educators, in general, did not hold high expectations for their SWDs before NCLB, and to the surprise of district personnel, SWDs were rising to the performance expectations of NCLB. One participant in the study reported the elation he felt because, for the first time, the achievement for SWDs was on an upward trend. While participants in the study acknowledged overall improvement in the achievement of SWDs, they were still skeptical that all SWDs would be able to reach the proficiency benchmark by 2014.

Another study, which examined school factors that contributed to the achievement of SWDs, concluded that one of the most consistent indicators in the performance of SWDs was the performance of all students (Malmgren, McLaughlin, & Nolet, 2005). In other words, when the school provided strong school-wide instructional support for all children, SWDs benefited too. Further, in these schools, there was widespread staff ownership for the performance of SWDs, not just ownership from the special education teachers. Finally, this study concluded that the success of SWDs was tightly linked to the quality of the special education staff and the type of instructional service model that was implemented in the school.



However, there are some unintended consequences when including SWDs in state assessments. Cole (2006) reported that an unintended consequence of the inclusion of SWDs in the general curriculum and assessment program is that many times they become scapegoats for the school's performance under the federal AYP mandate. In a survey of district administrators in Indiana, Cole reported that 70% of the superintendents believed that SWDs are blamed for districts not meeting AYP standards. Another unintended consequence was that district administrators reported that fewer SWDs were included in the general classrooms. In this same survey, 74% of superintendents reported there was pressure to pull more students out of the general education classroom for remediation purposes. Lastly, 66% of district administrators believed that assessment and accountability for SWDs had increased the dropout rate among this population. Overall, Sherman (2008) reported that superintendents in Virginia “. . . shared high levels of frustration with holding students with special needs to the same expectations as other students” (p. 685).

The lack of additional funding is another area of frustration with NCLB. Only when a school fails to meet the AYP standards for two consecutive years, thus falling under sanctions, does a school receive any additional funding (NCDPI, 2008a). Lashley (2007) contended that, while NCLB assures that students with disabilities have access to a standards-based curriculum and assessment program, unfortunately when schools have multiple subgroups of students and limited resources, some schools have made choices about which subgroup of students should get the focus of the school's limited resources. Funding issues are especially problems in rural schools as they often struggle to provide

specialized services to SWDs, particularly when there may be only a few students requiring a specialized program (McLaughlin, Embler, Hernandez, & Caron, 2005).

According to the 2009 April 1 headcount in North Carolina, there are 189,266 students identified within sixteen categories of disabilities ranging from those students identified as having a hearing impairment to those with a severe intellectual disability (NCDPI, 2009b). Further, 1.2% of SWDs have multiple disabilities and 8.1% of SWDs are Hispanic. While there are no data in North Carolina on the percentage of SWDs who may also qualify as a student with LEP, the Center for Educational Outcomes estimates that approximately 9% of students with LEP also qualify for special education services under IDEA (National Center for Educational Outcomes, 2009).

In North Carolina, SWDs may participate in the state testing program by accessing the general state test without accommodations, accessing the general state test with allowable accommodations, or participating in one of three alternate assessments (NCDPI, 2008c). In order for a student to access general state assessments with accommodations on North Carolina assessments, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team determines which accommodations are necessary to ensure that the individual student needs are met. Allowable accommodations typically fall into the categories of (1) modified test formats, (2) assistive technology devices/special test arrangements, and (3) special test environments (NCDPI, 2009g). Further, these accommodations may only be used on state assessments if the IEP team determines that the student also needs and is provided these accommodations within their daily instructional program.

As required by NCLB, alternate assessments are also available in North Carolina for some students with disabilities. During the 2008-09 school year, North Carolina

provided three types of alternate assessments: the North Carolina Checklist of Academic Standards (NCCLAS), the EXTEND2 assessment for students making progress towards grade level standards, and the EXTEND1 assessment for students with a significant cognitive disability. The NCCLAS assessments are grade-level, subject specific, alternate assessments in which teachers utilize a checklist to evaluate student performance on subject-specific or course-specific standards. This assessment is appropriate for students who are unable to access the standard tests even with the use of approved accommodations and assistive technology. While no cap is placed on the number of students whose proficient scores can be counted in AYP when taking the NCCLAS, state assessment guidelines describe that very few SWDs should access this testing option; however, no limitations are given (NCDPI, 2008c).

The EXTEND2 assessments are for students accessing modified academic achievement standards, which differ in complexity from the grade level achievement standards (NCDPI, 2009f). It is important to note that these assessments have modified achievement standards, not modified content standards. Thus, EXTEND2 assessments contain fewer test questions and item responses, shorter reading passages and use simplified language (NCDPI, 2009h). Further, NCLB guidelines placed a 2% cap on the number of students whose proficient scores can be counted for AYP when taking EXTEND2 assessments.

The EXTEND1 assessments are performance-based assessments aligned to alternate academic standards for students who are accessing the grade-level Extended Content Standards of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCDPI, 2009g). Again, these are for some students with significant cognitive disabilities. The NCLB

guidelines placed a 1% cap on the number of students whose proficient scores can be counted for AYP when taking EXTEND1 assessments.

Hardman and Dawson (2008) claimed that one major source of frustration for administrators is that the testing industry has failed to devise assessments that are appropriate for all SWDs. Because special education is grounded in individualized instruction, Hardman and Dawson (2008) proposed that assessments must be developed that also accommodate the unique needs of SWDs. Further, they advocated for the use of formative classroom assessments in order to adapt and individualize instruction for students. Recently, however, leading experts have published models to guide the process of designing alternate assessments that align to extensions of grade level content standards, which in turn, link to grade level content standards. (Flowers, Wakeman, Browder, & Karvonen, 2009; Kearns, Browder, Mims, & Quenemoen, 2010). Further, even though unpublished, a study has been conducted in North Carolina regarding the alignment of the EXTEND1 to the North Carolina Extended Content Standards (M. Karvonen, personal communication, June 23, 2010). Experts acknowledge that designing aligned alternate assessments is a complex process, yet one that must be undertaken in order for SWDs to appropriately access the general curriculum standards and to rightly participate in large-scale assessments.

In examining how to align classroom instruction to content standards for SWDs, Browder, Spooner, Wakeman, Trela, and Baker (2006) proposed that teachers must first have a thorough understanding of the academic content standards. To complicate this process, many teachers who are teaching SWDs in separate settings, are responsible for delivering instruction in multiple content areas. Thus, teacher collaboration between

special education teachers and general education teachers is extremely important in building their curricular knowledge base and to share instructional ideas, activities, and materials with each other. Further, teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities need professional development in aligning state standards and alternate state standards into meaningful, yet challenging instructional lessons (Kravonen, & Huynh, 2007). Finally, teachers of SWDs need professional development on translating state standards into IEP goals. Karvonen (in press) suggested that before well-designed and meaningful IEPs can be written, teachers must first collect baseline performance data on the student's present level of performance and then establish appropriate progress monitoring targets toward goal attainment.

While no studies could be found that linked superintendents' practices to the performance of SWDs or to assess their working knowledge of the issues of special education, Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Dezell (2006) conducted a study and concluded that principals' who had a personal experience with a SWD or had a special education license reported being more knowledgeable of referral procedures and laws pertaining to the rights of SWDs. While the majority of principals from this study reported they believed in high expectations for SWDs and more access to the general curriculum, less than 28% of them had a comprehensive working knowledge of how to design models to facilitate greater access to the general curriculum. Further, most principals reported having limited information about special education in their administrative licensure programs. Riehl (2000) confirmed this lack of professional training in administrative preparation programs. Further, Riehl suggested that not only should administrators be knowledgeable in special education laws, rights and

responsibilities, but they must understand the importance of and be able to promote inclusive school cultures. Superintendents also need to develop an awareness of effective instructional practices and programs for meeting the needs of SWDs.

*Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)*

In 2006, the percentage of students qualifying for LEP services in the nation was 9.4% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). Of those, 36.3% were Hispanic and 22.5% were Asian/Pacific Islander. The largest concentration of students with LEP reside in six states: Arizona, California, Texas, New York, Florida and Illinois (Capps, et al., 2005). However, other states have seen drastic increases in students with LEP. For example, in North Carolina, there has been an 87% increase in the number of students qualifying for LEP services from 2002 through 2007. Two hundred and thirty-four different home languages are represented by North Carolina students with 87% of those students speaking Spanish as their home language (NCDPI, 2009c).

NCLB requires that students with LEP who have been in U. S. schools for twelve months participate in state-wide assessments in reading and mathematics and that results of their performance be publically reported. Further, LEP students must be assessed annually for proficiency in English. NCLB also requires that each state set annual measurable objectives which must include annual increases showing progress in learning English and increases in the percentage of students attaining English proficiency (NCDPI, 2009a). Coltrane (2002) reported that many believe the testing requirement for students with LEP will force schools and teachers to be aggressive in meeting the academic and language needs of this group of students who were largely ignored before NCLB. Many believe that excluding students with LEP from statewide assessments

equates to excluding them from a quality educational experience (Butler & Stevens, 2001).

Tupa and McFadden (2009) reported that in the Brownsville Independent School District in Texas, where students with LEP comprise 43% of the student population, there is a no excuse attitude that is pervasive throughout the district with respect to achievement of this group of students. Teacher evaluations are tied to student achievement and principals monitor instruction through frequent classroom visits and provide instructional support for teachers who are struggling to implement the district's identified instructional framework. Principal evaluations are also tied to student achievement, thus, it is evident that all staff share in the responsibility for improving student achievement. Brownsville Independent School District has made tremendous improvement in the achievement of students with LEP, thus was recognized as the winner of the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2008. The Broad Prize recognizes urban school districts that have demonstrated improvement in student achievement while reducing the achievement gap for poor and minority students and provides \$1 million in scholarships for the winning district's graduating seniors who have shown significant improvements in their performance over their high school career and demonstrate financial need.

In a 2009 study released by the Council of the Great City Schools, six urban school districts across the nation making great strides in the achievement of students with LEP were studied to discover if similarities could be found among them. The researchers identified several key factors that these school districts had in common. One common finding was the existence of a shared vision of reform at the district level and high

expectations for students with LEP, coupled with the belief that the performance of students with LEP was every teacher's responsibility, not just LEP teachers. Consistent, strong leadership and advocacy for students with LEP at the district level were present in these districts. District administrators had the power to establish a district-wide instructional model and they monitored the implementation of the model. Further, results of student achievement were monitored and conversations were held with school principals regarding the achievement of their students with LEP. Important to note in this study was that the instructional model for students with LEP was a component of a comprehensive district-wide framework of instructional reform for all students. In other words, the instructional model for students with LEP was seen as a part of a district-wide model of instructional practices, not an add-on program. In addition, continuous support in the form of coaches and support staff was assigned to the school to provide on-going professional development for classroom teachers as they learned to implement these instructional strategies. Finally, recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers who work with students with LEP was found to be essential (Horwitz, et al., 2009). Porter (2000), a long time advocate for equity in education for students with LEP, also promoted setting expectations for high levels of performance as a key factor in improving the academic success of this population.

However, after three years of NCLB, Abedi and Dietel (2004) reported that the achievement on standardized state assessments for students with LEP is sometimes 20 to 30 percentage points below the performance of other students. Further, performance data revealed that there has been little improvement in this achievement gap over the years. In North Carolina in 2006, 55.5% of students with LEP scored at proficiency on the state



mathematics assessment in grades 3-8. In 2008, the AYP benchmark increased 11.4 percentage points, yet only 9.4% more students with LEP scored at the new AYP benchmark (NCDPI, 2006; NCDPI, 2007a, NCDPI, 2008b). Abedi and Dietel (2004) found similar results in other states and proposed that with this type of model and with the slow rate of progress of achievement for students with LEP, it appears impossible that 100% of students will meet the proficiency standard by 2014.

Another issue in the NCLB accountability model is that, as students with LEP become proficient on the state language proficiency assessment, the students are exited from the LEP program, and thus are no longer counted in the LEP subgroup. With only students who are not considered proficient in English in the LEP subgroup, Crawford (2004) proposed that it is a mathematical impossibility that this group of students could ever score proficient on state reading comprehension and mathematics assessments by 2014.

In North Carolina, those students whose home language is something other than English are required to be assessed with the English language proficiency identification test in four domains upon initial enrollment into a North Carolina public school. Results of the language proficiency assessment determine what modifications, if any, the student may access on state assessments. Further, these modifications must be used in everyday classroom instruction and on classroom assessments. Annually, these students are required to be reassessed with the language proficiency test to determine progress in language proficiency and to determine if those modifications are still appropriate for participation in the state testing program (NCDPI, 2009f).

The only students with LEP who are exempt from the state testing program and AYP calculations are students in their first year in U.S. schools who score below a certain level on the language proficiency test (North Carolina State Board of Education Policy GCS-C-021, 2009). During the 2008-09 school year, the NCCLAS alternate assessments were available for some students with LEP within their first 24 months in U.S. schools, depending on the results of their language proficiency assessment (NCDPI, 2008c). After two years in U.S. schools, students with LEP must take the regular grade-level state assessments. Modifications approved for certain tests include: allowing a student to use an English/native language dictionary or an English/native language electronic translator, providing multiple testing sessions, allowing extended time, allowing students to read aloud to themselves, allowing a test administrator to read aloud in English (except for reading comprehension assessments), and testing in a separate room (NCDPI, 2009f).

Most experts agree that it takes a student anywhere from four to seven years to achieve academic proficiency in English (Center for Public Education, 2007; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Collier (1987) defined academic proficiency as the ability of students with LEP to “. . . reach national grade level norms of native speakers in all subject areas of language” (p. 617). Yet, in North Carolina, under the current NCLB regulations, students with LEP must be assessed after being in the U.S. for 12 months using a grade-level content standards’ checklist. After two years, no matter how proficient the student is in English, he/she must take the regular grade-level state assessments in English and be accountable to the same standards as all students (NCDPI, 2009f).

Funding issues to support students with LEP remain a source of controversy in many states and communities, as federal resources are inadequate to serve the number of students with LEP (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Laguardia & Goldman, 2007). While some believed that the assessment requirement under NCLB would bring extra resources to support the learning of students with LEP, in actuality this has not been the case (Bratt, Kim, & Sunderman, 2005). Some fear that general education funding is being diverted to serve students with LEP and, in at least one state, Title I funds were being misused to fill in the funding gap for language minority students (Laguardia & Goldman, 2007). Consequently, political debates have ensued, such as the one witnessed in California prohibiting bilingual education. In more than half the states, legal suits are being pursued to challenge school funding inequities (Laguardia & Goldman).

The accountability of closing achievement gaps for all groups of students under NCLB has increased pressure for educators. However, perhaps no educator has felt this pressure more than superintendents as they are responsible for setting the tone for educational reform in the school district and are responsible for the implementation of local, state, and federal policy (Sherman, 2008).

#### *Brief Historical Perspective of the Superintendency*

In the early 1900s, historians agreed that the predominant role for superintendents was that of a manager (Kowalski, 2005). During the industrialization period from 1900-1930, the major purpose of education was to prepare students for the workforce. With the shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy, education began to move from one-room schoolhouses to larger schools with grade-level specific teachers and content. Created by local boards of education to oversee the fiscal management of

schools, the superintendent was one of the most visible and powerful individuals in the community. Most school boards operated rather passively during this era, thus the superintendent wielded a great deal of control and power over the operations of the schools (Houston, n.d.). Effective schools were seen as those that mirrored the productivity principles of industry. Thus, superintendent's management style paralleled scientific management (Candoli, 1995). Communities valued basic literacy, science, vocational education and business partnerships, thus school boards demanded that superintendents act as both business manager and instructional leader (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

With the launch of Sputnik in the 1950s and the passing of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, the emphasis for schools shifted to focus on national prosperity and national defense. Consequently, the public demanded a focus on producing students who could compete globally, especially in mathematics and science (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Even though there emerged more federal control of schools, school boards demanded superintendents become experts in politics, community involvement, and reform, with an increased emphasis on teaching mathematics, science, and foreign languages for all students (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Carter and Cunningham (1997) coined the role of the superintendency in this era as the "chief executive officer of the board" (p. 24) which required the superintendent to be the expert advisor to the board, leader of change and reform, financial expert, and an excellent communicator. In this era, the behavioral theory of management was popular among superintendents (Candoli, 1995).

The idea of a comprehensive education system began to emerge with an emphasis on educating every child equally, including SWDs, economically disadvantaged students, gifted students, and minority students. This philosophy of educating all children gave rise to the civil rights movement (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). During the racial tensions of the 1960s, particularly in response to the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, superintendents became more responsive to education reform, especially responding to the educational needs of students in poverty and minority children. Further complicating the educational setting was the increasing unrest of students as the antiwar movement gained momentum. The superintendent came under greater public inspection and criticism. Consequently, the public insisted on much more involvement in educational decisions (Houston, n.d.). In addition, the superintendent had to contend with teacher issues on a much larger scale as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers grew in strength (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

During the 1970s, the “education for all” philosophy began to take shape as Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This law withheld federal funding to states unless all handicapped children were granted access to a free public education in the least restrictive environment (Zettel, 1977). Accordingly, not only did superintendents have to become much more knowledgeable as to how to most effectively educate SWDs, but also had to address the myriad of rules, regulations, and parental rights that accompany this law. It was also during this time that many schools systems across the nation saw a drastic increase in the

number of immigrants, most of whom had little knowledge of the English language, and many of whom lacked formal education in their native language (Houston, n.d.).

By the 1980s, the superintendent's role began to shift as diverse communities and special interest groups demanded a voice in their public schools. In 1983, fueling the demand for further change in public education, the U.S. Department of Education released *A Nation at Risk*, a widely publicized report that called for extreme national reform of the educational systems in America (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Further, ideas and suggestions from special interest groups, task forces, and parental organizations as to how to improve schools were thrust upon superintendents and school boards. This national reform effort required that superintendents become better communicators and facilitators of change with honed persuasion techniques (Houston, 2001).

These demands continued into the 1990s as superintendents continued to find themselves trying to balance expectations with opposing debates from politically powerful entities. Thus, they found themselves having to be much more collaborative with all stakeholders while leading educational reform (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Even though school boards expected superintendents to be instructional leaders throughout the twentieth century, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the NCLB requirement of high stakes standardized assessment and accountability, coupled with punitive measures for inadequate student performance, began to shape the current state of the superintendency (Sherman, 2008).

The NCLB Act of 2001 clearly raised expectations and added an accountability component to the instructional role of superintendents. Sherman (2008) found that during 2001, the year the NCLB Act was signed into legislation, the majority of superintendents

in Virginia had little knowledge of achievement gaps between black and white students, even though some school districts had up to a 30 percentage point difference in achievement between these groups of students. In fact, most Virginia superintendents reported that their communities were not interested in discussing achievement gaps. In a 2000 study of American superintendents, Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported that 40% of responding superintendents believed that school boards hired them because of their personal characteristics and 26% perceived they were hired because of their instructional leadership abilities. However, five years after NCLB was signed into legislation, these results almost completely reversed. The 2006 mid-decade study of American superintendents revealed that 49% of the reporting superintendents perceived that boards hired them because of their instructional leadership abilities and 22% reported they were hired because of their personal characteristics. With increased emphasis on improving student test scores, it is not surprising that Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that the most common career path for sitting superintendents in 2006 was a previous position of an assistant/associate superintendent for curriculum and instruction. However, “A frequent (if not the leading) cause of superintendent dismissal is mismanagement of finances and budgets, not low test scores” (p. 35).

NCLB has forced superintendents to implement far-reaching federal mandates at the school district level, many of which come with inadequate funding (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Since 1950, in each of the 10-year studies of American superintendents by the American Association of School Administrators, superintendents cited financial issues as the biggest obstacle affecting their effectiveness. Funding is frequently inadequate to support the academic needs of economically disadvantaged

children, SWDs and students with LEP, yet these are the very groups of children that experience the most challenges in this era of high-stakes testing. To respond to these financial issues, some school districts have cut or eliminated programs and services not directly measured by NCLB (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Further, Glass (2006) cautions school boards not to overlook the role of management in the selection of superintendents. Being a competent manager is an equally important skill for superintendents as well as being a consensus builder, a planner, a communicator, and a visionary (Candoli, 1995).

Houston (2001) claimed that current and future superintendents must be excellent communicators, child advocates, collaborators, and instructionally knowledgeable. Even though the managerial role is one aspect of the superintendency, the superintendent's job is multifaceted, and the “. . . modern leader must possess those visionary and messianic skills” (Candoli, 1995, p. 346). Neuman and Pelchat (2001) proposed that the struggle for many superintendents is how to balance all the roles of the position while keeping instructional leadership practices a priority. For some superintendents, this may mean focusing on instruction by increasing the amount of time each day that is spent on instructional issues and in classrooms; however, for some superintendents, becoming an effective instructional leader and successfully using data for instructional improvement may require additional training. While the role of the superintendent has evolved, instructional leadership and the ability to drive instructional improvement have been commonalities throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework for this study is Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis of the relationship between superintendent leadership and student achievement.



Through an extensive examination of 27 quantitative studies that were conducted over a span of 25 years, involving over 2,500 school districts and over 4,000 ratings of superintendent leadership, Waters and Marzano found the following superintendent responsibilities had a significant ( $p < .05$ ) correlation to student achievement.

- Collaborative goal setting process
- Non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
- Board alignment with and support of district goals
- Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction
- Use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (p. 11).

In addition, this theoretical framework was used as a foundation for the current North Carolina Standards for Superintendents evaluation model, adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education in 2007 (NCDPI, 2007b). The following seven standards of executive leadership are currently being used to drive the evaluation process for superintendents in North Carolina and are presented in greater detail in Appendix B.

- Strategic leadership
- Instructional leadership
- Cultural leadership
- Human resource leadership
- Managerial leadership
- External development leadership
- Micropolitical leadership (NCDPI, 2007b, 3-6).

These seven standards incorporate the skills and competencies that the North Carolina State Board of Education proposed will result in creating a culture of change fueled by distributed leadership and collaborative relationships, focusing on using data and research-based instructional practices that will prepare all students to be successful in the twenty-first century (NCDPI, 2007b). The areas of superintendent responsibility and practices that Waters and Marzano (2006) concluded had a statistically significant impact on student achievement can be found throughout all the North Carolina Standards for Superintendents (NCSS). What follows is a brief description of each standard and the alignment to the responsibilities and practices identified by Marzano and Waters. Table 1 depicts a summary of the alignment.

*Alignment of the Theoretical Framework to North Carolina Standards for Superintendents*

Strategic leadership in the NCSS refers to practices that superintendents use to bring stakeholders together collaboratively to develop the vision, mission, and strategic goals for the district. Further, the strategic goals should challenge all students to meet high expectations and to provide educational experiences that prepare students for college and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this standard, the superintendent facilitates the district strategic plan, manages the change process, and monitors the progress in meeting the district goals. This standard aligns with areas of superintendent responsibility from Waters and Marzano (2006) which ensure a collaborative goal setting process is occurring in the district, along with the responsibility of monitoring district goals for achievement and instruction.

Table 1

*Alignment of the North Carolina Standards for Superintendents to the Theoretical Framework*

North Carolina standards for superintendents	Waters and Marzano's practices
Strategic leadership	A collaborative goal setting process; monitoring goals for achievement and instruction
Instructional leadership	All areas, but predominately setting non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction
Cultural leadership	A collaborative goal setting process
Human resource leadership	Use of resources aligned to support goals for achievement and instruction
Managerial leadership	Alignment of resources to support the district goals for achievement and instruction
External development leadership	Collaborative goal setting process; board alignment and support of goals for instruction
Micropolitical leadership	Collaborative goal setting process; board alignment and support of goals for instruction

The instructional leadership standard of the NCSS includes practices that superintendents utilize to set high standards for professional practice and high standards for student learning. There is an emphasis on the use of formative and summative student achievement data to improve instruction as well as utilizing an instructional evaluation model to monitor the implementation of the district's instructional program. Engaging staff in functioning professional learning communities and providing instructional leadership professional development for principals are included in this standard. Standards in the instructional leadership standard of the NCSS encompass practices from

all areas of superintendent responsibility in the research of Waters and Marzano (2006), but most predominately in the areas of establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction and monitoring the district goals for achievement and instruction. The superintendent responsibility for monitoring goals for achievement and instruction includes managing the change process, monitoring the implementation of the instructional program and monitoring student achievement.

The standard in cultural leadership focuses on the superintendent understanding a district's culture, honoring that culture, while moving the district forward to meeting the district goals. This standard also includes the practice of the superintendent communicating his or her beliefs about the teaching and learning process to all stakeholders. This standard aligns loosely with the goal-setting responsibility of the theoretical framework. However, the human resource leadership standard of the NCSS is closely aligned to Waters and Marzano's (2006) superintendent responsibility of ensuring resources are available to support the goals for achievement and instruction. This standard includes practices that ensure continuous professional learning is occurring in the district as well as providing time for personnel to engage in meaningful professional learning communities. Ensuring that professional learning is aligned with district goals for instruction and achievement is also included in this standard.

The managerial leadership standard of the NCSS includes the procedures and processes that a superintendent deploys to oversee the business and auxiliary services of the district. While not explicitly noted in Waters and Marzano's (2006) work, there is the overall expectation that resources are aligned to support the district goals for achievement and instruction. The external development leadership standard and the micropolitical

leadership standard of the NCSS focus on engaging the community and stakeholders to support and embrace the district's vision. In addition, these standards involve building active partnerships with business, community colleges, universities, and professional organizations to provide meaningful professional learning opportunities for school professionals. The micropolitical standard further includes the superintendent's ability to understand the political climate of the district and community as well the legal issues affecting the school district. These NCSS standards align to the practices that are found in the superintendent responsibilities of the goal-setting process and board alignment and support of district goals in the theoretical framework.

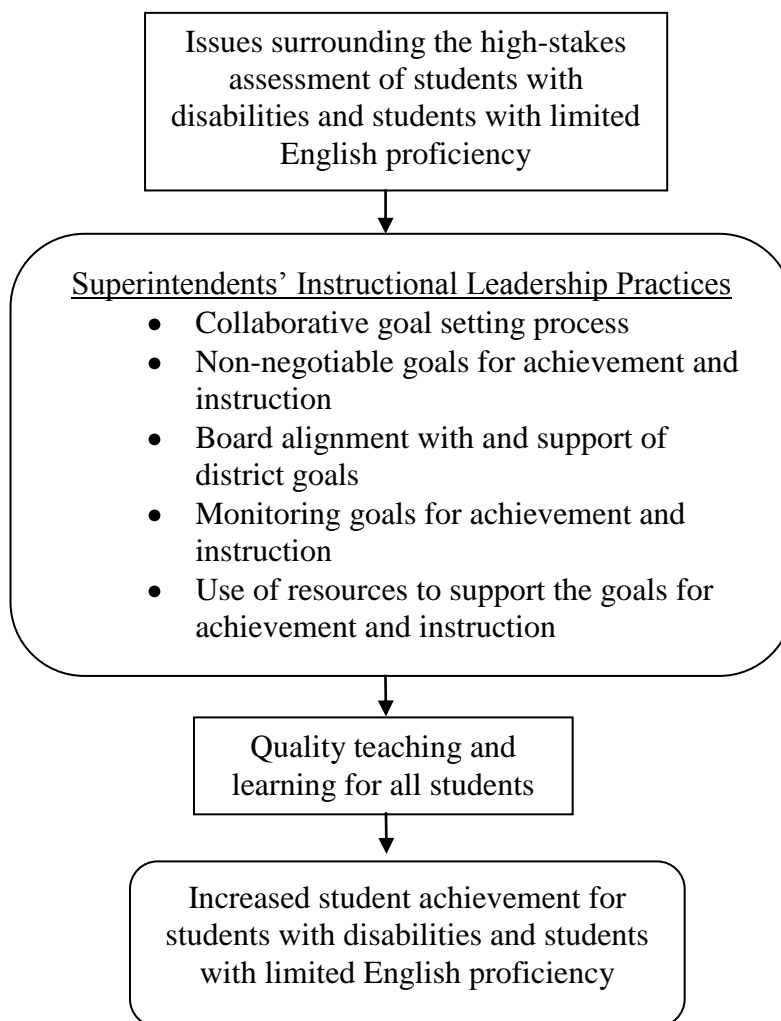
In conclusion, while the NCSS contains a much broader spectrum of leadership practices, 25 of the 29 superintendent responsibilities that Waters and Marzano (2006) identified in their meta-analysis are explicitly used as practices in the NCSS.

Consequently, the practices that Waters and Marzano (2006) identified: (1) ensuring a collaborative goal setting process, (2) establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, (3) ensuring board alignment with and support of district goals, (4) monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and (5) utilizing resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction will be used as a framework for this study involving instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the impact on the achievement of SWDs and students with LEP. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study.

#### *Collaborative Goal Setting Process*

A common finding in school districts with high student performance and significant progress toward closing the achievement gap for minority and poor children is

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the current study.




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an emphasis on strategic planning and goal setting at the district level (NCDPI, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Furthermore, effective superintendents used a collaborative process that involved active participation from all stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, parents, and school board members, in the goal setting process (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2009; Waters & Marzano, 2006). To begin the goal setting process, effective school superintendents

disaggregated student performance data by district, school, subject, grade level, classroom, and by student. Further, they publicly discussed the data with many different groups in order to gain stakeholder buy-in (Borba, 2002; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Sherman, 2008). They did not make excuses for why some groups of students were not performing well; they accepted responsibility for the learning of all students and believed that all students can perform at the same level of academic success, regardless of race or socio-economic status (Skrla et al., 2000). Sherman's (2008) study concluded that NCLB seemed to be a catalyst for superintendents to examine and recognize achievement gaps; however, his findings indicated that the legislation has not made any discernable progress towards eliminating the achievement gap.

In a study conducted by the Charles A. Dana Center in Texas in 2000, researchers found that in high-performing school districts with high-poverty schools, superintendents spent a great deal of time gaining the trust of all stakeholders before embarking on a strategic planning process. In general, the study revealed that growth and improvement in student achievement appeared to take place during the times in which there was a high level of trust between the superintendent and school board (Skrla et al., 2000).

Spending time listening to parents and different groups to glean what they felt was important in terms of improving the school district, and in particular, in terms of improving the performance of minority and poor students was identified as being a way to establish trust and stakeholder buy-in (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1998). Shannon and Bylsma (2004) found that one of the four themes that emerged from the review of over 80 research articles on characteristics of improved school districts was the district administrations' emphasis on establishing clear and collaborative relationships with the

external environment. Building a culture of mutual trust, commitment, partnerships, and collaboration contributed to developing a district's capacity for implementing and sustaining improvement efforts.

*Non-negotiable Goals for Achievement and Instruction*

While high-stakes accountability models may have been the impetus for change, a belief and commitment in the academic success of all students exists in high-performing school districts. Skrla et al. (2000) found that superintendents and school boards believed they had a moral and ethical obligation to ensure the success of all students. A vision for student learning and goals for student achievement were collaboratively established and supported by the superintendent and the school board. Finally, the established goals reflected changes that were essential to improving student performance (Waters & Mazano, 2006).

These goals were articulated as non-negotiable, were applicable to all students, and excuses for the performance of minority and disadvantaged students were not tolerated (Snipes & Casserly, 2004). Further, the superintendent articulated these goals to all central office staff and to principals (Skrla, et al., 2000; Waters & Marzano, 2007). All stakeholders' attention was focused on achieving these academic goals and the superintendent established clear expectations that principals were responsible for developing plans in their schools that would result in the achievement of these goals (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). In comparison, in a study conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board, districts that failed to bring about improvements in high schools did not have a clearly articulated and focused plan for improvement. Thus, many principals viewed district actions as “. . . a series of



random improvement acts, rather than a well-designed system of improvement” (SREB, 2009, p. iv). District-level goals for student achievement and instruction that are clearly defined and articulated provide the framework to which schools should align their school improvement efforts (NCDPI, 2000).

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) reported an emphasis on quality teaching and learning as a predominant finding in their research on instructionally effective school districts. Further, there was a substantial amount of district-level coordination and support of a preferred instructional model that was expected to be implemented in classrooms. Most school districts required district-wide textbook adoptions, along with district-directed professional development. Focus, coordination, and consistency appeared to be common themes found in instructionally effective school districts.

Similarly, a North Carolina study found that in high poverty/minority school districts that were high achieving, district staff provided district-wide pacing guides and integrated lesson plans to ensure that all teachers were teaching the required state curriculum (NCDPI, 2000). Two additional studies (Snipes, et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003) found that superintendents in high achieving school districts focused their attention on quality instruction. They realized there was no quick fix to strengthen classroom instruction, but sought ways to highlight their own teachers who were achieving impressive academic results with all groups of students. Because all teachers were working on the same curricular goals at the same time throughout the district, teachers could share best practices with each other. Moreover, district staff were better able to focus and coordinate professional development for the district’s teachers.

In high poverty, high achievement school systems, district leaders continuously searched for best practices, examined current research, and facilitated teachers visiting other teachers' classrooms (Ragland et al., 1998; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). Instructionally effective school districts demonstrated a continuous quest for improvement, but the improvement efforts were well planned and tended to be long range in nature (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). Developing a common understanding and vision of effective instruction is an essential task along with coordinating and aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Defining what good instruction is and developing an instructional framework are key components in effective school districts. The annual Broad Prize for Urban Education was established in 2002 to honor and financially reward urban school districts across the nation that demonstrate the most overall performance and improvement in student achievement, particularly focusing on reducing achievement gaps for minority and poor children. McFadden (2009) studied school districts that were finalists for this award and found that personnel in these school districts spent a great deal of time discussing and defining what good instruction looks like. Commercial programs, textbooks, and software were considered tools, not the instructional program. These districts struck a balance between a required instructional framework and flexibility for schools. For example, one finalist, Broward County Public Schools in Florida, required teachers to focus on implementing Marzano's identified nine instructional strategies that most impact student learning. Finally, district professional development was provided for all teachers and job-embedded instructional support was available, particularly during

their first two years, in lesson planning and in implementing the identified instructional strategies.

*Board Alignment with and Support of the District Goals*

Ragland et al. (1998) proposed that superintendents in high-performing, high-poverty school districts maintained a strong relationship with the school board and a high level of trust between the board and the superintendent. Superintendents were comfortable with the direction of the board and the board had trust and confidence in the superintendents' ability to lead and manage the school district. Both the board and superintendent had a shared vision of student achievement, yet the board allowed the superintendent the freedom to implement programs and initiatives to meet these goals.

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) proposed that school boards in instructionally effective school districts could be described as “. . . falling somewhere on a continuum between noninterference and supportiveness” (p. 176). Additionally, in instructionally effective school districts, the school district did not face extreme opposition within the community. In general, communities appeared to be supportive of the school district's initiatives, but usually this acceptance manifested itself in passivity. Moreover, this study found that even though the board was quite involved in shaping the direction of the district, there was little evidence of lack of support and consensus between the board and the superintendent.

In a quantitative study conducted in Texas, Coleman (2003) sought to discover whether there was a statistically significant difference in what superintendents in selected school districts perceived as their role and responsibilities and what the board presidents in those school districts perceived the superintendent's actual or perceived practices to

be. Further, the study sought to determine if there was a statistically significant impact on student learning in those districts where there was alignment between the superintendent and school board president's perceptions. The study concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the superintendents' and school board presidents' perceptions as to what role the superintendent should play in the organization. However, the study concluded that there was not a statistically significant impact on student achievement in those districts where there was alignment between the superintendent and school board president's perceptions. The study further indicated that in school districts with high student performance, superintendents' practices were closely tied to the ideal practices of a superintendent as described by the Texas superintendents' standards.

In a case study of urban schools districts for the Council of the Great City Schools, Snipes and Casserly (2004) concluded that in school districts that were making progress toward increasing student performance, school boards transitioned from focusing on the day-to-day operations of the district to making policy-level decisions that supported gains in student achievement. Board members sought support for districts' initiatives by taking many opportunities to share the district strategic plan with community members and by making the community aware of the progress the district was making on student achievement.

#### *Monitoring Goals for Achievement and Instruction*

In a case study on effective urban school districts, Snipes and Casserly (2004) found that school boards periodically monitored the progress of district goals by examining multiple sources of data, including student and school performance, and

stakeholder satisfaction. Further, monitoring instruction was a key piece of the improvement initiative along with an emphasis on teacher accountability (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Through collecting data, making it accessible, and providing it in an understandable manner, district office staff in effective school districts played a key role in shaping a culture that was data-driven (Foley et al., n.d.; Snipes et al., 2002).

In a study from the Anneberg Institute for School Reform, four data-driven school districts were studied to determine the manner in which they collected, examined and made decisions based on data. These school districts developed a data-driven culture by finding ways to conveniently store data that were easily retrievable and user-friendly to school staff. Further, these districts developed a system of standardized formative and summative assessments that provided feedback to teachers and students as they progressed through the year. School leaders in these districts reported that having a standardized formative assessment system, along with providing time for teachers to discuss the results of the assessments by linking the results directly to additional instructional support for students, were key pieces in their instructional monitoring process (Foley et al., n.d.).

In an SREB study, principals in the most improved high schools reported having technology that allowed teachers to gain easy access to student data so that instructional practices could be enhanced in curricular areas that most needed improvement (SREB, 2009). A North Carolina study found the practice of using diagnostic formative assessments, developed at the district-level, was a common practice found in high poverty/minority school districts that were also high performing (NCDPI, 2000). Finally,

by using formative assessments, effective school districts provided timely assistance for struggling students (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

This process, sometimes called benchmarking or progress monitoring, also sets the stage for teachers to collaborate in professional learning communities to examine how their students performed in comparison to students in other schools and, most importantly, to share best teaching practices. Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002) proposed that “If we are going to build a results-oriented school in a results-oriented district, we have to have results-oriented teacher teams who are focusing on setting some very specific goals for student achievement” (p. 81).

Another practice often found in effective school districts is the process of groups of teachers conducting classroom walkthroughs in order to see other teachers’ practices and to examine student work (Foley et al., n.d.). Further, Schmoker (2006) proposed that central office staff, teachers, and administrators go on classroom visits several times a year to be followed by candid discussion regarding standards and evidence of research-based instructional practices. Schmoker also advocated the importance of teachers opening their classroom doors for others to visit, watch, and learn.

Effective school districts also monitored the performance of schools through an examination of student performance outcomes, classroom visits, and evaluations of principals (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; SREB, 2009). Effective school districts required that “. . . district staff spend a significant amount of time in schools, working collaboratively and purposefully with school leaders and teachers to make instruction more engaging and essential content more relevant to students” (SREB, 2009, p. 27). Further, SREB recommended that evaluations of all district office staff be tied to their

contribution to schools improving their instructional practices and student performance indicators. While superintendents held principals accountable for the performance of their students and intervened when necessary, they also celebrated the progress of students (Borba, 2002; Marlatt, 2004). Subsequently, support for schools was individualized to assist schools with their particular needs; however, schools were expected to use their resources to support student achievement (American Institutes for Research, 2005; Borba, 2002).

Moreover, if principals are expected to assume an instructional leadership role and are being held responsible for the performance of their students, then professional learning opportunities should be made available to them. For example, in the Ysleta Independent School District, principals were required to attend a monthly day-long professional development activity that focused on instructional topics such as the analysis of assessment data and leadership topics such as how to facilitate change in their organization (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). SREB (2009) also emphasized the importance of providing professional development to build principals' leadership capacity. The findings from this study concluded that districts must not only provide conferences and seminars, but districts should also provide opportunities for principals to network with each other, visit each other, assign a buddy principal, and provide individualized coaching from a district-level supervisor.

Cawelti and Protheroe (2001) posited that principals are the crucial individuals who have to be active in monitoring the instructional practices that teachers are expected to implement. However, a North Carolina study found that as a means of monitoring instruction in high poverty or minority schools that were also high performing, district

leaders, including superintendents, were also in the schools each week observing, working with various programs, and providing feedback (NCDPI, 2000).

Overall, high performing school districts provided a system-wide framework of instructional practices that were research-based and not simply a series of canned instructional programs. They provided professional development for teachers on the instructional framework, expected teachers to implement these practices in classrooms, assessed the progress of students, worked in teams to share best practices, made adjustments in instruction, and used multiple ways to monitor the instructional program.

*Use of Resources to Support the Goals for Achievement and Instruction*

Even though superintendents across the nation reported that inadequate funding was the number one factor inhibiting their effectiveness (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), superintendents in high-performing school districts focused their resources on supporting instruction (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Further, these superintendents re-focused the work of the central office from monitoring and compliance to supporting schools in their efforts to improve instruction. For instance, the superintendent in one school district in Texas cut administrative positions in order to provide more funds for instruction (Ragland et al., 1988). Schmoker (2006) proposed that principal meetings led by central office staff should be focused on instructional issues that allow time for principals and staff to brainstorm strategies for improvement and implementation. Johnston (2001) advocated that district-level staff must become “. . . rapid-response teams that support student achievement” (p.18), with the “. . . goal of making life as smooth as possible for the teachers and other employees who work directly with students” (p.18).



Hammond and Saltzman (2007) described an example from Dr. Jane Hammond's experience as a new superintendent of Jefferson County Public Schools in Golden, Colorado. Dr. Hammond was confronted with the issue of a dysfunctional central office staff. Principals and teachers reported that the district personnel were unresponsive and created obstacles rather than supporting schools to find solutions. After the development of a strategic plan that focused on student achievement and the development of core values, the superintendent challenged district staff to demonstrate behaviors that supported these core values. At the end of the first year, she surveyed school staff to see how district staff were supporting these values. The district staff rose to high levels of exemplary performance within one year. Next, the superintendent designed a campaign to promote these core values to all school staff. Once these core values became embedded in the culture of the district, there was increased ownership in student achievement.

McFadden (2009) reported that in school districts that were finalists in the Broad Prize for Urban Education, district staff were assigned or partnered with individual schools. District staff met with their partner schools on a weekly basis for the purposes of providing information about district-wide initiatives and to support teachers as they were striving to improve instruction. They also provided resources and information to their partner schools.

Superintendents in successful school districts in Texas focused their valuable resources for professional development on building staff knowledge and skills through coordinated and focused professional learning opportunities designed to build teacher capacity. A new model of professional development was implemented which brought teachers together to analyze data, plan, and reflect on their instructional practices, and to

examine student work. The majority of the professional development was job-embedded whereby instructional specialists or facilitators supported or coached teachers during the instructional process. They also modeled lessons and helped teachers examine assessment data (Skrla, et al., 2000).

Borba (2002) reported that superintendents in high performing, high poverty school districts expected teachers and principals to engage in on-going professional development. Similarly, in North Carolina, coherent, sustained district-level professional development was a commonality found in high poverty/minority and high performing school districts. Further, the professional development focused on content and research-based instruction and was aligned with long-term district goals. District staff assumed the responsibility for researching these instructional practices, and staff also supported and facilitated professional development that was aligned to the research-based instructional practices (NCDPI, 2000).

In effective school districts, resources are not allocated to schools on a straight per pupil formula, but the funding formula is adjusted to take into account the number and percentage of students in poverty. Additional resources are allocated to schools with a higher proportion of low-performing students, or if a school has unique instructional needs (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004).

#### *Advancing Equity for all Students*

Rorrer et al. (2008) proclaimed that the first step in creating an equitable school district is for the system to acknowledge and own its past inequities. Several processes were commonly found in equitable school districts. They disaggregated student achievement data by ethnicity, socio-economic status, limited English proficient status,

and students with disabilities. Further, equitable school districts did not make excuses for the performance of students; rather, they took responsibility for it. Equitable school districts advocated high expectations for all students as well as the importance of coherent, aligned instruction and professional development.

High expectations for all students became the mantra for effective school districts, coupled with a belief that staff could have an impact on student learning for all children, even those with the greatest challenges (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Clark, 2004; Hammond, 2003; NCDPI, 2000; Portis & Garcia, 2007; Ragland et al., 1998; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Skrla et al., 2000; Snipes & Casserly, 2004). Not only was there an emphasis on high performance expectations for students, but effective school districts held high expectations, coupled with accountability for the teachers and principals (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). For example, when examining the four school winners of the 2007 Excellence in Urban Education Awards that recognize schools for the outstanding achievement of their students with LEP, high expectations fueled the success these schools had with diverse learners (Aleman, Johnson, & Perez, 2009).

In some school districts that have demonstrated a reduction in the achievement gap for minority and disadvantaged students, one of the first steps in reducing this achievement gap was to openly acknowledge the achievement gap exists (Rorrer et al., 2008; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Many times educators in high-poverty schools will acknowledge that certain groups of students are not performing well; however, they quickly concede that these children are doing the best they can and cannot be expected to perform any better. As models, superintendents in successful high-poverty school districts used student performance data from teachers in the school district who were

getting successful results from these groups of students. Implicit in this technique was the message that “. . . if this can be done in some classrooms and schools, it can be done in all classrooms and schools” (Ragland, et al., 1998, p. 6). Further, these superintendents used current student performance data to create a sense of urgency for improvement.

In an examination of superintendents’ practices and initiatives to meet the needs of diverse learners, Hammond (2003) conducted a study of 10 Washington school districts that were making progress in closing the achievement gap between African American, Hispanic, and Native American students and their white peers. The study concluded that the behaviors of these superintendents varied very little from the practices cited in previous studies of effective superintendents in high-achieving, high-poverty school districts. In this study, the researcher found that these superintendents were committed to a strategic planning process, setting standards for performance, and aligning curriculum and professional development. They were well grounded in a belief that all students can learn and achieve success and also had a commitment to closing the achievement gap, even though they rarely spoke about particular ethnic groups. Furthermore, Portis and Garcia (2007) posited that superintendents’ dissatisfaction with the existing achievement gaps was a prime motivator in moving them ahead with district reform initiatives.

In addition, school districts that have reduced the achievement gap by implementing research-based strategies have embraced the belief that all children can learn (Rorrer et al., 2008; Snipes, et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003 ). Further, they developed a plan to ensure equal access to all academic programs for all students, implemented extra academic support programs so that students would be successful and

implemented a variety of instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001).

Waters and Marzano (2009) emphasized the concept of high reliability organizations (HROs) in which the focus of these districts was to ensure high quality instruction in every classroom, every day. The foundation of this type of organization was the establishment of non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction through a collaborative goal setting process. In addition, in HROs, school board support, monitoring systems, and financial and human resources were tightly aligned to district goals for achievement and instruction. Finally, the researchers demonstrated that there was a statistically significant relationship between these practices and student achievement.

#### *Other Variables That May Contribute to Increased Student Achievement*

While the current study focuses on the variables cited above, much educational research has been conducted to see if class size reduction, teacher quality, and per pupil expenditure are variables that may show a positive relationship to student achievement. What follows is a brief summary of the research surrounding each variable and the impact on student achievement.

#### *Class Size Reduction*

Many studies have been conducted over the last 30 years involving the relationship between student achievement and class size, yet the class size reduction debate is still unresolved. One of the most widely known studies on the impact of class size reduction and student achievement is the Tennessee Project Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) report. This 1985, kindergarten through third grade

longitudinal study, which was conducted by the Tennessee Department of Education, involved over 70,000 students and 79 schools. Students and teachers were randomly assigned to one of three intervention groups: (1) small class size of 13 to 17 students per teacher, (2) regular class size of 22 to 25 students per teacher, and (3) regular class size with a teacher assistant. The study concluded that there was a statistically significant increase in student achievement in the small class sizes over the achievement of students assigned to either of the two other groups. Further, in reading achievement, these results were more significant for minority and low-income students than for middle class, white students (Tennessee State Department of Education, n.d.).

Another widely known class size reduction study is the Wisconsin Student Achievement Guarantee in Education Program (SAGE), which began in 1996. The SAGE program included four major initiatives: (1) class size with a student-teacher ratio of no more than 15:1; (2) extended school hours; (3) the establishment of a rigorous curriculum; and (4) refined professional development program for teachers in the classrooms with reduced class size. The SAGE project used the following strategies to meet the 15:1 student teacher ratio: (1) small classes with 15:1 student-teacher ratio in one classroom; (2) two teacher teams with student-teacher ratio of 30:2 in one classroom; (3) three teacher teams with a teacher ratio of 45:3 in one classroom; and (4) a roving teacher joining a 30:1 classroom daily for core content classes. The quasi-experimental research study concluded positive results for students in reduced class size, with the findings most significant for minority and low-income students in mathematics and language arts. Further, the study concluded that there was no statistically significant

difference in the achievement of students in the four different strategies used for class size reduction (James, Jurich, & Estes, 2001).

In 1996, California also implemented a state-wide class size reduction initiative; however, Stretcher, Bohrnstedt, Kirst, McRobbie, and Williams (2001) noted some unexpected consequences occurred as a result of this reform effort. In just six weeks, after the California legislature passed and funded the K-3 class size reduction reform effort at \$1.5 billion per year, state-wide class sizes were reduced from 30 to 20.

Evaluations of the class size reduction initiative concluded that students from small class sizes performed slightly better on standardized assessments; however, these benefits were not seen in high poverty, high minority schools. The authors proposed that the initiative was implemented so quickly that high poverty, high minority schools actually saw a decrease in overall teacher quality and that funding sources were often diverted from other programs and services to create additional classroom space for the class size reduction initiative. This finding supports Hanushek's (2002) conclusions that highly effective teachers are the most predictive variable of student achievement.

Much controversy exists on class size and the effect on student academic achievement and the studies that have been conducted. Borland, Howsen, and Trawick (2005) claimed that previous studies on class size reduction and student achievement contain methodological flaws because researchers did not control for certain variables. Hanushek (2002) reported that after investigating 277 studies involving class size reduction and student achievement, only 14% of the studies revealed a positive significant relationship between class size and student achievement. Fourteen percent of the studies revealed a negative significant relationship between class size and student

achievement and the vast majority of studies, 72%, concluded the relationship between class size and student achievement was insignificant (Hanushek, 2002). Bracey (1999) and Slavin (1989) also confirmed that the majority of class size reduction studies were inconclusive and included a myriad of other variables which were not statistically controlled.

Nye, Hedges and Konstantopoulos (2004) examined multiple studies involving class size reduction efforts and concluded that one experimental study, the Tennessee STAR class size reduction study, is the only valid, large-scale experiment that provides external validity. However, Hanushek (2002) proposed that even though the methodology and results of the STAR study are strong, before generalizing these results to other populations, multiple repeated experiments must be conducted in a variety of settings. Buckingham (2003) proposed that when examining closely the findings from the SAGE project, The STAR project, and the California class size reduction program, all studies have serious methodological flaws and the quality of teaching and the methods of teaching were the most significant variables on student achievement.

### *Teacher Quality*

Slavin (1989) proposed that one of the reasons that class size reduction efforts have provided mixed results is that teacher behavior did not change much in reduced size classrooms. Haycock (1998) concluded that “If we took the simple step of assuring that poor and minority children had teachers of the same quality as other children, about half of the achievement gap would disappear” (p. 2). Hanushek (2002) concurred, and further concluded that the difference between a highly effective teacher and a poor teacher can mean as much as a full level of achievement for students in one school year.



What makes an effective teacher is still not solidified by the research but, in general, Buckingham (2003) concluded the following criteria could be identified:

- Mastery of subject matter and curriculum content;
- Awareness of individual abilities and capabilities of students;
- Classroom management skills;
- Use of teaching strategies that are proven effective; and
- Good verbal communication skills (p. 19).

Closely related to Buckingham's criteria, Goe and Stickler (2008) defined teacher quality in terms of four areas. The first area was teacher qualification, which included the teacher's deep knowledge of subject-matter, degrees earned, and on-going professional learning. Teacher characteristics comprised the next area of teacher quality, which included teacher beliefs, expectations for student learning, and the use of collaboration among teaching peers. A third area of teacher quality included instructional practices teachers use on a consistent basis encompassing research-based teaching practices and formative assessments. This area also included the practice of aligning curriculum and instruction to student assessment. Lastly, teacher quality was defined in terms of student achievement outcomes on standardized assessments.

In a multi-state study examining teacher qualifications and the impact on student achievement, Darling-Hammond (1999) concluded that teacher quality, which was defined as full certification and a major in the teaching field, was a more powerful indicator of student achievement than class size, teacher salaries, and per pupil spending.

Further, teacher quality had a stronger correlation to student achievement than a student's socioeconomic background.

Haycock (1998) reported results from a study conducted in Tennessee on the impact of most effective teachers and least effective teachers on student achievement. On average, low-achieving students who spent one year in a least effective teacher's classroom increased in achievement by approximately 14 percentile points on the state's value-added approach for assessing student achievement. Conversely, low-achieving students who spent one year in a most effective teacher's classroom increased in achievement by approximately 53 percentile points on the state assessment program. While the most drastic gains in student achievement were realized with low-performing students, high-performing students gained 23 percentile points and average-performing student gained 20 percentile points on the state assessment program when spending a year with a most effective teacher as opposed to a least effective teacher. These findings have enormous implications for schools and districts that are struggling to increase achievement, particularly for low-achieving students.

#### *Per Pupil Funding*

There appears to be no general consensus in the educational literature that per pupil funding has a positive impact on student achievement. Much public debate surrounds this issue as well as much debate among educational researchers. In a two-year state-wide study conducted in Oklahoma, Ellinger (1995) examined six independent variables to see which variables, if any, had an impact on student achievement. The independent variables were: (1) total per-pupil revenue, (2) percentage of minority students, (3) percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced meal prices, (4)

average teacher salary, (5) percentage of teachers with advanced degrees, and (6) average years of teacher experience. The dependent variable was eleventh grade achievement test scores. The percentage of minority and free or reduced meal price variables had a significant negative effect on test scores with the percentage of free or reduced meal prices being the strongest predictor of low test scores. Further, the three teacher characteristics did not show a correlation to student test scores. The study concluded that the only variable that showed a statistically significant positive correlation to student achievement was per-pupil expenditures. In a more recent study, Ram (2004) studied the relationship between per pupil school funding and student achievement as measured by mathematics and verbal SAT scores. Again, the study concluded that per pupil expenditures had a statistically significant positive impact on student achievement as measured by SAT scores. However, the study estimated that raising per pupil funding by \$1000 per student typically had only a 4-point increase in SAT scores.

On the other side of the per pupil expenditure debate, Sutton and Soderstrom (2001) conducted a statewide study in Illinois to determine the relationship between 13 independent variables, including per pupil funding, and the achievement of students on third and tenth grade reading and mathematics assessments. The study concluded that there was not a statistically significant relationship between per pupil funding and student achievement.

One of the leading researchers on this topic, Hanushek (1996), proposed that there is no conclusive empirical evidence that increased per pupil funding has a positive impact on student achievement due in large part to the fact that more funding did not necessarily mean that districts and schools used these funds effectively. Hanushek claimed that after

examining 163 studies on the impact of per pupil expenditures on student achievement, only 27% produced a statistically significant positive relationship. However, Krueger (2002) disputed these findings and the methodology Hanushek used to determine the findings and proposed that if funding is not correlated to student achievement, then why has there been litigation on issues of inadequate funding for some schools, particularly high poverty schools? Elliott (1998) proposed that the correlation of per pupil funding to increased student achievement occurs when the funds are used to hire the most qualified teachers and to provide them effective professional training in order to increase instructional capacity. Thus, the discussion cycles back to the direct link between teacher quality and student achievement and the findings of Darling-Hammond (1999) that teacher quality was a more powerful indicator of student achievement than class size, teacher salaries, and per pupil spending.

The research appears inconclusive regarding the association between student achievement and class size or per pupil funding. However, the literature suggested that there may be an association between student achievement and teacher quality. Nevertheless, the current study will only focus on those instructional leadership practices of superintendents as identified in the meta-analysis of Waters and Marzano (2006).

### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology for the study and includes information about the participants, the instruments, the procedures, and the statistical analyses used in the study. The first section will describe the participants for the study and the second section will describe the instrument that was developed by the researcher. The process used to determine reliability and validity of the survey will be discussed along with data collection procedures used for the survey. Finally, the data analysis section will describe the statistical analyses used in the study.

The purpose of this study was to discover if there is a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of students with LEP and SWDs as measured by proficiency on state assessments. The research questions for the study were:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with LEP?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with LEP?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their SWDs?

4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their SWDs?

Thus, the null hypotheses for the study are:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with limited English proficiency.
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with limited English proficiency.
3. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with disabilities.
4. There is no statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with disabilities.

#### *Population and Sample*

The population was comprised of all public school superintendents in North Carolina and the target sample was those superintendents who were in their current position during the 2008-09 school year and had student performance data reported for their SWDs or students with LEP on their North Carolina School Report Card. To generate a list of the target superintendents, a multi-layered approach was used. First, a list of all current superintendents available through the NCDPI's website was cross-

referenced with the superintendents listed in the 2008-09 North Carolina Education Directory. Ninety-four superintendents were in their current position during the 2008-09 school year. Next, the 2008-09 District Report Cards were accessed for these superintendents' districts to confirm that there were at least five or more SWDs or five or more students with LEP in the school district. If districts had fewer than five students in both groups of students, then these superintendents were eliminated from the sampling frame as data were not available for these groups of students. Ninety-two districts had data reported for students with LEP and all 94 superintendents had at least five or more SWDs, thus all 94 superintendents remained in the sample.

#### *Instrument and Data Sources*

The purpose of this study was to discover if there was a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of their students with LEP and SWDs as measured by the percent of students who were proficient in reading and mathematics on the North Carolina End-of-Grade assessments. The achievement data in grades 3-8 for reading and mathematics were gathered for SWDs and students with LEP from the 2009 North Carolina District Report Cards. The North Carolina End-of-Grade assessments in reading and mathematics are criterion-referenced and norm-referenced assessments designed to determine student mastery or proficiency of the standardized North Carolina curriculum at each grade level. The percentages of proficient SWDs and students with LEP in reading and mathematics for each district were typed into a spreadsheet and double-checked for accuracy.

The superintendents' instructional leadership practices were assessed in five areas of superintendent leadership responsibilities as described by Waters and Marzano (2006) and as shown in Appendix C. This work was also used as the foundation for the new North Carolina Superintendents Standards (Appendix B). With permission from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) (Appendix D), the described leadership practices were adapted into Likert-type scale survey items. The leadership practices were aligned to each of five areas of superintendent leadership responsibility, and subsequently, the adapted survey items were also aligned to each of the five areas of leadership responsibility as such:

- (1) a collaborative goal setting process,
- (2) non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction,
- (3) board alignment with and support of district goals,
- (4) monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, and
- (5) use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

The survey (Appendix F) consisted of thirty-one survey items with four to nine survey items per area of responsibility. The Likert scale for each survey item had the following interval scale choices:

- (1) strongly agree,
- (2) agree,
- (3) neither agree nor disagree,
- (4) disagree, and
- (5) strongly disagree.



Part II of the survey was designed to give superintendents an opportunity to describe other practices which had been implemented in their districts to strengthen the academic achievement of SWDs and students with LEP. In addition, the survey provided an opportunity for superintendents to add comments about the challenges their district experienced in meeting the AYP requirements for SWDs and students with LEP. The survey concluded with Part III which included nominal scale questions regarding the gender and age of the superintendent, the number of years experience as a superintendent, and the number of years in the current school district as superintendent.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

The pilot survey was sent to seventy-three district administrators, other than superintendents, in the western region of North Carolina for field-testing purposes and for an item reliability analysis. A feedback form (Appendix E) accompanied the field test survey in order to gather advice to improve the clarity of the survey items, the clarity and straightforwardness of the directions, and the format of the survey. Further, respondents were asked to estimate the time it took to complete the survey.

Thirty-one district administrators responded to the field-test survey. More than one respondent reported that two survey items, number 16 and number 17, were unclear and consequently, these items were revised on the final survey. One respondent suggested that more space be placed between survey items to improve the format and two respondents suggested that the Likert-type scale choices be re-organized so that the neutral response fell in the middle of the scale rather than at the end of the scale. The survey was revised because of these suggestions. Finally, respondents reported that it

took an average of 8.34 minutes to complete the survey, which indicated that the length of the survey should not negatively affect response rates.

According to Garson (2008), a Cronbach's alpha analysis is the most commonly used test for internal consistency reliability of Likert-type survey items. This analysis was completed on each cluster of survey items that was designed to correlate to each area of superintendent responsibility. Table 2 contains the results of the internal consistency reliability test. All areas meet the standard of  $\alpha > .60$ , which is considered a lenient, but acceptable cut-off in exploratory research (Garson, 2008).

Table 2

*Test for Internal Consistency Reliability of Pilot Data*

Areas of Superintendent Responsibilities	Cronbach's Alpha
I. Ensuring a collaborative goal setting process	.853
II. Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction	.812
III. Ensuring board alignment with and support of district goals	.636
IV. Monitoring goals for achievement and instruction	.912
V. Ensuring the use of resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction	.774

Since area III contained two survey items that were modified according to the field test feedback, the researcher determined that the reliability analysis would most likely increase as a result of these changes.

A panel of four professors from the Educational Leadership and Foundations department at Western Carolina University was asked to participate in the survey validation process. The validators were asked to categorize the survey items into one of

five identified superintendent's responsibilities from the research of Waters and Marzano (2006). The four validators made the same groupings as Waters and Marzano did 50% of the time, but in the other 50% of items, only half of the validators agreed. Further, since there was very little variability in the superintendents' responses coupled with the fact that an exploratory factor analysis of the actual survey responses determined that the items did not clearly load onto factors that correspond to the five identified areas of superintendents' responsibilities as identified by the theoretical framework, a decision was made to sum the responses into a total leadership score across all areas for the statistical analyses.

#### *Data Collection Procedures*

A high response rate from the 94 superintendents in the sample was needed in order to generalize results from the sample to the population with more confidence. The researcher had a minimum goal of at least a 50% response rate as Creswell (2005) conveyed that most reputable educational journals report at least a 50% response or better. In order to more accurately estimate the response rate for this study, previous studies involving mailed superintendent surveys were examined and those studies yielded response rates from 60% to 93% (Bredeson & Johanssen, 1997; Burnette, 1989; Byrd, Slater, & Brooks, 2006; Castagnola, 2005). Based on these studies, a 50% response rate would likely be achievable. Further, Creswell (2005) reported that approximately 30 participants are needed for a correlational study that relates variables, thus a 50% response rate would yield slightly more than this number of participants.

Heppner and Heppner (2004) reported that typically 30% of participants will respond to a well-designed survey on the first attempt and each additional attempt will

increase the response rate about 10%. Further, Creswell (2005) proposed that along with studying a topic of interest and having a well designed survey, a three-phase survey administration will assist in attaining a good response rate. Thus, a three-phase survey administration was used with a prenotice letter mailed to the target sample a week prior to the survey mailing and one follow-up attempt was made within a week of the survey deadline.

In keeping with the recommendations of Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009), the prenotice letters were personalized, brief, appealed to the expertise of respondents, and demonstrated high regard and appreciation for responding (Appendix G). Within one week of the prenotice mailing, the surveys were mailed along with a cover letter. The surveys were coded so that district student achievement data could be matched to the appropriate district superintendent. All codes were removed once the data were analyzed. As recommended by Dillman, et al. (2009), the cover letter was personalized, communicated the purpose of the study, and why respondents were asked to participate in the survey. The cover letter also provided an assurance of confidentiality and participation in the survey served as consent to participate in the study. (Appendix H). A stamped return envelope was included with the survey as recommended by Dillman, et al. (2009) to increase the likelihood of quick responses. Two administrative assistants notified the researcher by email that their superintendents were no longer with the district. Thus, there were 92 superintendents in the survey sample. By the survey deadline, 64 surveys were returned for a 69% rate of return.

After the original survey deadline, a follow-up post card was sent serving as a thank you and as a reminder for nonrespondents to complete the survey (Appendix I).

The post card thank you/reminder generated the return of six additional surveys, for a total of 70 returned surveys or a 76% response rate.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Descriptive and parametric tests were used to draw conclusions about the data and to test the hypotheses. Interval scale responses and nominal scale questions from the survey were entered into a spreadsheet and then imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software which was used for the statistical analysis. The following scale was assigned to the survey response choices:

- (5) strongly agree,
- (4) agree,
- (3) neither agree nor disagree,
- (2) disagree, and
- (1) strongly disagree.

Since there was very little variability in the superintendents' responses and an exploratory factor analysis of the actual survey responses determined that the items did not clearly load onto factors that correspond to the five identified areas of superintendents' responsibilities as identified by the theoretical framework, a decision was made to sum the responses into a total leadership score across all areas for the statistical analyses.

The percentage of LEP students proficient in reading and mathematics and the percentage of SWDs proficient in reading and mathematics on the North Carolina state assessments in grades 3-8 were gathered from the 2009 North Carolina District Report Cards and matched to the corresponding superintendent's responses and subsequently were entered into the software. All data were double-checked for data entry accuracy.

This study used a correlational research design. The correlational research design was selected because the study sought to determine if a statistically significant relationship or association existed between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents in North Carolina and the percentage of their LEP students and SWDs who were proficient in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. Creswell (2005) described the characteristics of correlational research as:

- (1) the researcher correlates two or more variables,
- (2) data are collected at one point in time,
- (3) all participants are analyzed as a group, and
- (4) at least two scores are obtained for each group.

For the current study, the summed survey item responses, which captured the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents, was the independent variable. The four dependent variables in the study were:

- (1) the percentage of LEP students proficient in reading,
- (2) the percentage of LEP students proficient in mathematics,
- (3) the percentage of SWDs proficient in reading, and
- (4) the percentage of SWDs proficient in mathematics.

The achievement data in grades 3-8 for reading and mathematics were gathered for SWDs and students with LEP from the 2009 North Carolina District Report Cards.

A Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was used to determine if an association existed between the independent variable and each of the four dependent variables. Further, three covariates were considered initially: teacher quality, per pupil expenditures, and class size. However, since the literature review was inconclusive

regarding an association between student achievement and per pupil expenditures and class size, these variables were not considered as covariates. On the contrary, the literature review concluded that teacher quality was associated with student achievement. Thus, a correlation was computed to determine if an association existed between teacher quality and the independent variable. Statistics used in the study are described in Table 3.

Table 3

*Data Analysis for the Study*

Research Question	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Method
1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with LEP?	Summed data from all survey questions	Percentage of students with LEP proficient in reading	Pearson correlation
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with LEP?	Summed data from all survey questions	Percentage of students with LEP proficient in mathematics	Pearson correlation
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their SWDs?	Summed data from all survey questions	Percentage of SWDs proficient in reading	Pearson correlation
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their SWDs?	Summed data from all survey questions	Percentage of SWDs proficient in mathematics	Pearson correlation

Frequency distributions were calculated on each survey item in order to identify erroneous entries and to determine measures of variability. Values were assigned to the nominal responses. To determine the range, mean, and standard deviation of the superintendents' ages, years of experience as a superintendent, and years of experience in the current position, descriptive statistical measures of central tendency and measures of variability were used. Finally, the dependent variables were sorted so that open-ended responses could be reported and counted.

To analyze the open-ended survey responses, the districts were sorted four times from highest to lowest with respect to: (1) the percentage of LEP students proficient in reading; (2) the percentage of LEP students proficient in mathematics; (3) the percentage of SWDs proficient in reading; (4) and the percentage of SWDs proficient in mathematics. Each superintendent's response was typed into a spreadsheet to get a general sense of the data as recommended by Creswell (2005). The qualitative data were first reported for each responding district within the 10 highest performing districts for each group of students for both reading and mathematics achievement. The data were then reported from the 10 lowest performing districts for each group of students for reading and mathematics achievement. Finally, the data from both the 10 highest and 10 lowest performing districts were listed, counted, and summarized for each group of students for reading and mathematics achievement (Creswell, 2005).

This chapter provided information on the research methodology, including the population and sample, the survey instrument and the survey process, the field-test process, and the data collection and analysis. The following chapter will provide information on the results and analysis of the research questions.



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to discover if there was a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of students with LEP and SWDs as measured by state assessments in reading and mathematics for grades 3-8. This chapter will present the results of the data collected from current North Carolina superintendents who were also in their current position during the 2008-09 school year. The data presented in this chapter include frequency distributions for all survey questions, demographic data from the study participants, data from the four research questions, and responses to the open-ended questions from the survey.

The research questions for the study were:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with LEP?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with LEP?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their SWDs?

4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their SWDs?

#### *Demographic Profiles of Respondents*

Seventy of 92 North Carolina superintendents responded to the survey for a 76% response rate. Thus, there were 22 nonrespondents. Demographic information was gathered from the 70 respondents which included the number of years in their current position, total number of years of superintendent experience, gender, and age ranges. However, six respondents did not provide demographic responses. Therefore, demographic data of the respondents ( $n = 64$ ) are displayed in Table 4.

A plurality of respondents have been in their current district between zero and three years (42.2% of the population). Few respondents have been in their districts for more than 10 years. A plurality of respondents have 10 or more years of experience as a superintendent (31.3%), 23.4% of respondents had zero to three years of experience and 23.4% of respondents had four to six years of experience as a superintendent ( $Mdn = 7-10$  years). Eighty-one percent of the respondents were male and 18.8% were female. Nearly 38% of respondents were between the ages of 51 and 55 (37.5%) and 31.3% were between 56 and 60 years old.

#### *Analysis of Research Questions*

Superintendents responded to a Likert-type scale survey depending on the degree to which they agreed with each of the survey statements. Descriptive statistics were generated for each question to determine the frequencies and percentages of superintendents' responses. See Appendix J for frequency distributions. The variability

Table 4

*Demographic Characteristics of Superintendents*

Demographic	n	%
Years of experience in current district		
0-3	27	42.2
4-6	24	37.5
7-10	8	12.5
10+	5	7.8
Total years of experience as a superintendent		
0-3	15	23.4
4-6	15	23.4
7-10	14	21.9
10 +	20	31.3
Gender		
Male	52	81.3
Female	12	18.8
Age		
<40	0	0
40-45	5	7.8
46-50	8	12.5
51-55	24	37.5
56-60	20	31.3
61+	7	10.9

among response answers was low, with most responses (92.9%) in the strongly agree and agree categories. Thus, all responses from each superintendent were summed and a Pearson Product Moment Correlation test was computed between the summed item responses and each of the dependent variables in order to answer each research question.

*Research Question One. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with LEP?*

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents ( $M = 107.13$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ) and the reading achievement of their students with LEP ( $M = 39.74$ ,  $SD = 13.96$ ). All response items were summed and compared to the corresponding percent of proficient students with LEP in grades 3-8 for reading achievement. The Pearson's  $r$  statistic revealed a weak, negative correlation,  $r = -.096$ ,  $p = .436$ ,  $r^2 = .92$ . Thus, the practices that superintendents reported in the study had a weak inverse association with the reading achievement of students with LEP. Only .92% of the variation in the reading test scores for students with LEP could be accounted for by the superintendents' reported practices. With a 95% confidence interval, the estimated correlation within the population was between  $-.326$  and  $.145$ .

To acquire more information about the reading achievement of students with LEP, the open-ended responses from superintendents were examined to determine what other practices had been implemented in the district to support the academic achievement of their students with LEP. All district data from the sampling frame were sorted by the percent of students with LEP proficient in reading (range = 16.7% to 100% proficient) in order to identify the 10 highest performing districts and the 10 lowest performing districts. Only five of the 10 highest performing districts provided responses to the first survey question; they ranked first, second, third, seventh, and ninth highest. These responses are reported in Table 5.

One practice that was identified by two superintendents in the highest performing districts is the use of Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) model, which is the model that the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recommends for use as a universal

Table 5

*Identified Practices by the Highest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for Students with LEP*

District	n	Percentage of proficient LEP students	Identified practices
Highest	8	100	Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI)
Second highest	13	84.6	Instruction was monitored at four-week intervals using an unidentified assessment program aligned to North Carolina Standard Courses of Study
Third highest	139	70.6	RtI, Wilson Reading program, and Saxon Phonics
Seventh highest	508	53.5	Dual language program in five elementary schools and one middle school; Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
Ninth highest	55	48.3	A Spanish-speaking teacher who works well with parents of students with LEP

intervention model to diagnose and then prescribe specific research-based interventions to support children who are not performing on grade level. The model further requires that student progress must be monitored frequently by using curriculum-based, normed assessments (NCDPI, 2010). RtI is based on the national model, Response to Intervention (RTI). The biggest difference between the two models is the North Carolina model addresses instructional interventions for all students whereas the national model is more focused toward appropriate identification of students with disabilities (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010).

Wilson Reading was a program identified by another of the highest performing district superintendents. This literacy intervention program is designed for students in grades two and above who need intensive support in word study, spelling, fluency, and comprehension and can be used one-on-one or in small groups of students (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007). This superintendent also identified the use of Saxon Phonics, which is a commercially developed K-3 program that can be used as a stand-alone reading program for whole class instruction, a supplementary program, or an intervention reading program. This program focuses on phonics, phonemic awareness, spelling, handwriting, and fluency instruction (Saxon Reading, n.d.).

Another one of the highest performing district superintendents identified the use of a dual language program. Dual language programs have varied structures, but the National Dual Language Consortium (n.d.) describes dual language as a type of bilingual education whereby students are taught half the school day in the second or dual language. Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) was also a practice identified in this district. This is a research-based model of sheltered instruction whereby the general curriculum teacher incorporates eight linguistic components into the instructional program to support the learning of students with LEP (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.).

On the other end of the continuum, six of the 10 lowest performing districts provided responses; they ranked second, third, fourth, sixth, ninth, and tenth. These results are reported in Table 6. One superintendent in the lowest performing districts identified America's Choice as a practice, which is a school-wide redesign program that provides literacy and mathematics instructional programs to accelerate the learning

Table 6

*Identified Practices by the Lowest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for Students with LEP*

District	n	Percentage of proficient LEP students	Identified practices
Second lowest	47	21.3	Co-teaching model of inclusion
Third lowest	137	23.1	America's Choice program, Corrective Reading program
Fourth lowest	132	24.5	Student achievement is disaggregated for all groups of students
Sixth lowest	6	25	Unnamed research-based reading program
Ninth lowest	247	28.2	Two-way second language immersion model
Tenth lowest	442	28.5	Use of technology for student engagement

of students who are two or more years below grade level in reading and mathematics achievement (America's Choice, 2010). The same superintendent also named the use of Corrective Reading, a research-based reading program designed for students in grades 3-8 who are one or more years behind in reading (Marchand-Martella, Martella, & Przychodzin-Havis, 2010). Another superintendent noted a two-way second language immersion program. According to the National Dual Language Consortium (n.d.) a two-way immersion program is one in which half the students in the class are native English speakers and half the students are native speakers of another language. Further, at least

50% of the time instruction is provided in the partner or dual language for academic content.

In response to the second question identifying challenges, responses from superintendents with the highest and the lowest performance with respect to the reading achievement of their students with LEP were examined. Only two of the highest performing districts reported challenges; they ranked the highest performing district and the third highest performing district. These responses are located in Table 7.

Table 7

*Identified Challenges by the Highest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Highest	8	100	Lack of on-site professional development
Third highest	139	70.6	Transient population of students and limited resources for personnel

Only four of the lowest performing districts provided information describing challenges. They ranked the second, third, sixth, and tenth lowest performing districts. These responses are described in Table 8. Two superintendents in the lowest performing districts mentioned the lack of high expectations for students as being a challenge. Overall, in examining responses from both the highest and lowest performing districts, three superintendents noted the lack of resources as being a challenge and two described challenges with providing comprehensive professional development.



Table 8

*Identified Challenges by the Lowest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Second lowest	47	21.3	Lack of high expectations for students and lack of resources
Third lowest	137	23.1	Failure to get involvement of all staff in professional development in all areas
Sixth lowest	6	25	No accountability for many schools as they do not have enough students with LEP to constitute a subgroup; lack of adequate resources
Tenth lowest	442	28.5	Lack of high expectations for these students

*Research Question Two. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with LEP?*

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents ( $M = 107.13$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ) and the mathematics achievement of their students with LEP ( $M = 68.87$ ,  $SD = 9.46$ ). All response items were summed and compared to the corresponding percent of proficient students with LEP in grades 3-8 for mathematics achievement. The Pearson's  $r$  statistic revealed a weak, negative correlation,  $r = -.139$ ,  $p = .259$ ,  $r^2 = .019$ . Therefore, the practices that superintendents reported in the

study had a weak inverse association with the mathematics achievement of students with LEP. Only .019 % of the variation in mathematics test scores for students with LEP could be accounted for by the superintendents' reported practices. With a 95% confidence interval, the estimated correlation within the population was between  $-.365$  and  $.102$ .

In order to gain more insight, the achievement data were sorted and the 10 highest performing districts and the 10 lowest performing districts, with respect to the percent of proficient students with LEP in mathematics, were identified (range = 41.7% to 100% proficient). Six of the highest performing districts provided information on practices they have implemented; they ranked first, fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth. Those responses are located in Table 9.

Table 9

*Identified Practices by the Highest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	<i>n</i>	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Highest	8	100	Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI)
Fifth highest	63	82.5	Multiple monitoring systems are used to ensure that teachers and principals were on track with instruction for LEP students
Seventh highest	55	79.3	No particular instructional focus, but has a Spanish speaking teacher who works well with parents of students with LEP
Eighth highest	107	78.8	Specialized professional development to strengthen instructional practices of teachers

Table 9 (continued)

*Identified Practices by the Highest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Ninth highest	508	78.4	Dual language program in five elementary schools and one middle school; Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)
Tenth highest	63	77.2	Graphic organizers, and new second language component of their K-2 assessments

Three of the districts with the highest performance with respect to students with LEP in mathematics were also among the highest performing districts in reading for students with LEP. They were the highest, seventh highest, and ninth highest. Thus, these responses are duplicated responses to those previously reported for students with LEP in reading. The remaining three districts, the fifth highest, the eighth highest, and the tenth highest are unduplicated responses.

Five of the lowest performing districts provided responses that identified practices; they ranked fourth, fifth, sixth, ninth, and tenth lowest performing districts. These responses are located in Table 10. Three of the districts with the lowest mathematics achievement for students with LEP also appeared in the lowest performing districts for reading achievement. They were the fifth, ninth, and tenth lowest performing districts. Thus, these responses are duplicated responses from those previously reported for students with LEP in reading.

Table 10

*Identified Practices by the Lowest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Fourth lowest	18	55	Benchmark data at the end of each quarter
Fifth lowest	137	55.2	America's Choice curricula
Sixth lowest	432	55.5	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent visit schools two to three times per year to discuss student achievement
Ninth lowest	245	58.1	Two-way language immersion program
Tenth lowest	2619	60.6	SIOP

A few of the highest performing districts and the lowest performing districts in mathematics achievement for students with LEP identified challenges in meeting AYP with this group of students. Three of the highest performing districts provided responses. They ranked the highest performing, the fifth highest, and the tenth highest. These responses are reported in Table 11. The highest performing district in mathematics achievement for students with LEP was also the highest performing district in reading for this group of students. As previously reported, this district identified lack of on-site professional development as a challenge.

Table 11

*Identified Challenges by the Highest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Challenges
Highest	8	100	Lack of on-site professional development
Fifth highest	63	82.5	Allocation of significant resources to this group with limited improvement in performance
Tenth highest	63	77.2	Limited time and resources

Only three superintendents in the lowest performing districts with respect to students with LEP in mathematics provided challenges; they ranked third, fifth, and sixth lowest performing. These responses are described in Table 12.

Table 12

*Identified Challenges by the Lowest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for Students with LEP*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Challenges
Third lowest	187	54.7	Lack of qualified staffing
Fifth lowest	137	55.2	Lack of involvement of all staff in comprehensive professional development
Sixth lowest	432	55.5	Low expectations, beliefs and values

The fifth lowest performing district also was one of the lowest performing districts in reading achievement. Thus, this is a duplicated response.

*Research Question Three. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their SWDs?*

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents ( $M = 107.13$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ) and the reading achievement of their SWDs ( $M = 38.81$ ,  $SD = 13.09$ ). All response items were summed and compared to the corresponding percent of proficient SWDs in grades 3-8 for reading achievement. The Pearson's  $r$  statistic revealed a weak, negative correlation,  $r = -.161$ ,  $p = .182$ ,  $r^2 = .026$ . Therefore, the practices that superintendents reported in the study had a weak inverse association with the reading achievement of SWDs. Only .026 % of the variation in reading test scores for SWDs could be accounted for by the superintendents' reported practices. With a 95% confidence interval, the estimated correlation within the population was between  $-.381$  and  $.076$ .

In order to glean more information regarding practices that the 10 highest and the 10 lowest performing districts in reading achievement for SWDs have implemented, the reading achievement data were sorted and corresponding open-ended responses were examined (range = 14.4% to 79.8% proficient). Six of the highest performing districts provided information on this portion of the survey; they ranked first, second, sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth and provided the following responses which are described in Table 13.

Table 13

*Identified Practices by the Highest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Highest	736	79.9	Emphasize Marzano's top five instructional strategies; principals monitor daily classroom instruction; instructional coaches to support teachers; quarterly benchmark assessments
Second highest	335	70.5	RtI, differentiated instruction, diagnostic interim assessments, plus technology
Sixth highest	113	56.3	Inclusion, RtI, and LANGUAGE! reading program
Eighth highest	553	53.3	Performance of SWDs increased when moving to a push-in model of inclusion instead of isolated, self-contained programs; school-based day treatment programs, and availability of mental health services at school sites
Ninth highest	229	53	Designed school schedules so that student interventions can take place during the school day; strong More at Four preschool programs
Tenth highest	327	52.5	Emphasis on Reading Foundations model of teaching reading and Thinking Maps

A few programs reported in these responses have not been previously described. The superintendent from the sixth highest performing district reported using a program entitled LANGUAGE! for SWDs in reading instruction. This commercially developed

comprehensive reading program is researched-based and designed for students scoring below the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading achievement. (*Sopris West*, n.d.). Another superintendent reported an instructional emphasis on Reading Foundations, an evidenced-based reading instructional model that was developed through the North Carolina State Improvement Project II. This model incorporates the findings of the National Reading Panel and the five features of an effective reading program (North Carolina State Improvement Project II, n.d.).

On the other end of the spectrum, six of the lowest performing districts responded to the open-ended question identifying practices; they ranked second, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, and tenth lowest performing districts. These responses are described in Table 14.

Table 14

*Identified Practices by the Lowest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Second lowest	410	14.6	Corrective Reading program; America's Choice
Fifth lowest	217	21.8	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent visit schools two or three times per year to discuss student achievement
Sixth lowest	969	22.6	Limited inclusion model due to budget constraints
Seventh lowest	230	23.5	First year of RtI



Table 14 (*continued*)

*Identified Practices by the Lowest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified Practices
Ninth lowest	173	25.4	Monitor student progress every four weeks with benchmark assessments
Tenth lowest	2279	25.8	Use of unidentified oversight model to support and increase student achievement

Challenges were also identified by the highest performing districts and the lowest performing districts with respect to reading achievement for SWDs. Only three of the highest performing districts identified challenges. They ranked sixth, ninth, and tenth highest performing. Results from the highest performing districts are described in Table 15.

Table 15

*Identified Challenges Reported by the Highest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Sixth highest	113	56.3	Too many cross-categorical classes due to small size of school district; lack of on-site professional development

Table 15 (*continued*)

*Identified Challenges Reported by the Highest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Ninth highest	229	53	AYP improved for SWDs when we moved to a push-in inclusion model at the middle schools; some schools do not have a subgroup and do not have accountability for these students
Tenth highest	327	52.5	Limited time and resources

Only three of the lowest performing districts provided information on challenges. They ranked lowest, second, and fifth lowest performing districts. Responses are listed in Table 16.

Table 16

*Identified Challenges Reported by the Lowest Performing Districts in Reading Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Lowest	83	14.4	Lack of adequate, qualified staff
Second lowest	505	24.6	Lack of ownership of our SWDs by regular education teachers; lack of involvement of all staff in comprehensive professional development
Fifth lowest	217	21.8	Low expectations, beliefs, and values

Overall, the lack of resources, lack of adequate staff, and lack of comprehensive professional development were reported by one superintendent from the lowest performance band and by one superintendent from the highest performance band.

*Research Question Four. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their SWDs?*

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents ( $M = 107.13$ ,  $SD = 10.23$ ) and the mathematics achievement of their SWDs ( $M = 56.68$ ,  $SD = 13.80$ ). All response items were summed and compared to the corresponding percent of proficient SWDs in grades 3-8 mathematics achievement. The Pearson's  $r$  statistic revealed a weak, negative correlation,  $r = -0.064$ ,  $p = .596$ ,  $r^2 = .004$ . Therefore, the practices that superintendents reported in the study had a weak inverse association with the mathematics achievement of SWDs. Only .004% of the variation in mathematics test scores for SWDs could be accounted for by the superintendents' reported practices. With a 95% confidence interval, the estimated correlation within the population was between  $-.294$  and  $.173$ .

To gather more information, districts were sorted by the percentage of proficient SWDs in mathematics within the sampling frame and the 10 highest and 10 lowest district responses were examined (range = 14.4% to 88.8% proficient). Five of the highest performing districts provided information in the open-ended portion of the survey that identified practices; they ranked first, fourth, sixth, eighth, and ninth. Responses are listed in Table 17. Responses from three of the highest performing districts for mathematics

Table 17

*Identified Practices Reported by the Highest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified practices
Highest	850	88.8	Emphasize Marzano's top five instructional strategies; principals monitor daily classroom instruction; instructional coaches support teachers; quarterly benchmark assessments
Fourth highest	335	81.2	RtI; differentiated instruction; technology-based interim assessments to monitor student progress and prescribe interventions
Sixth highest	113	77.3	Inclusion model of delivering instruction for SWDs
Eighth highest	229	75.6	Specific time during the school day when students receive intervention and enrichment; high quality preschool programs
Ninth highest	139	74.6	Multiple monitoring systems to track the performance of students

achievement for SWDs were also reported in the highest performing districts in reading achievement. They are the highest, fourth highest, and the sixth highest. Thus, these answers provide duplicated information with respect to the same group of students.

Six of the lowest performing districts provided responses that identified practices; they ranked third, fourth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth lowest performing districts. These responses are listed in Table 18. Responses from three of the lowest performing

Table 18

*Identified Practices Reported by the Lowest Performing Districts in Mathematics**Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified practices
Third lowest	393	34.6	America's Choice curricula
Fourth lowest	197	6.3	First year of RtI
Seventh lowest	217	40.2	Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent visit schools two or three times per year to discuss student achievement
Eighth lowest	1972	40.2	Oversight model (unidentified) to support and increase student achievement
Ninth lowest	588	41	Positive Behavior Intervention Support model
Tenth lowest	1189	41.1	Technology used to increase student motivation

districts for mathematics achievement for SWDs were also reported in the lowest performing districts in reading achievement of SWDs. They are the lowest, the third lowest, and the seventh lowest districts. Thus, these district responses are duplicated responses. One program that has not previously been described is the Positive Behavior Intervention Support model. This school-wide model focuses on supporting student social and behavioral practices to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes (Dunlap, Goodman, McElvoy, & Paris, 2008).

Challenges that survey respondents identified in the 10 highest and the 10 lowest performing districts with respect to the mathematics achievement of SWDs were also examined. Only two of the highest performing districts identified challenges; they were the highest and the sixth highest. These responses are provided in Table 19.

Table 19

*Identified Challenges Reported by the Highest Performing Districts in Mathematics Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Highest	736	79.8	Lack of adequate resources
Sixth highest	113	56.3	Too many cross-categorical classes due to small school system; lack of on-site professional development

The only unduplicated response was provided by the superintendent of the highest performing district.

Six of the lowest performing districts provided responses identifying challenges. They were ranked third, fourth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth lowest performing districts. These responses are listed in Table 20. Superintendents from the lowest performing, the third, and seventh lowest performing districts were among the lowest performing in reading for SWDs, thus these are duplicated responses. Therefore, the only new responses were those provided by superintendents from the ninth and tenth lowest

Table 20

*Identified Challenges Reported by the Lowest Performing Districts in Mathematics**Achievement for SWDs*

Districts	n	Percentage of proficient students	Identified challenges
Lowest	83	14.4	Lack of qualified staffing
Third lowest	393	14.6	Lack of ownership for SWDs by regular classroom teachers; failure to get everyone involved in professional development
Seventh lowest	217	21.8	Low expectations, beliefs, and values
Ninth lowest	588	25.9	Funding and staffing
Tenth lowest	1189	27.2	Raising expectations

performing districts. Again, superintendents cited inadequate funding and low expectations as challenges for meeting the needs of SWDs.

*Summary of Findings*

The current study resulted in a few interesting findings. No statistically significant correlations were found between the leadership practices of superintendents and the reading or mathematics achievement of their SWDs or students with LEP. The associations were close to zero in all cases and all associations were negative.

In examining the responses to the open-ended questions, some interesting findings emerged. Fifty percent of the districts appearing in the 10 highest performing districts for reading *and* mathematics for students with LEP were the same. Eighty percent of the districts falling in the 10 highest performing districts in reading *and* mathematics for

SWDs were the same. Likewise, 40% of the districts appearing among the lowest performing districts for reading *and* mathematics for students with LEP were the same and 60% of the districts that were identified as lowest performing in reading *and* mathematics for SWDs were the same. Further, two districts were among the highest performing districts in reading and mathematics for both groups of students. Similarly, two districts were among the lowest performing districts in reading and mathematics for both groups of students. Not all districts in the identified performance bands provided information on the open-ended survey items. The following provides a summary of the findings from those districts providing information.

Overall, the Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) model was the most commonly cited practice for supporting the learning needs of SWDs and students with LEP among those districts that had at least one group of students within the 10 highest performing districts with respect to percentage of students scoring at the state proficiency level. Frequently monitoring the performance of SWDs and students with LEP and providing focused instructional interventions for these students were also cited as practices by more than one district. However, these practices are incorporated within the RtI model.

The district with the highest number of students with LEP ( $n = 508$ ) scored in the 10 highest performing districts in both reading and mathematics and reported using the SIOP model of instruction. The most common challenges noted among all districts having at least one group scoring within the 10 highest performing districts were limited resources and limited personnel. The second most common challenge noted was the lack of high expectations for performance for SWDs and students with LEP.



Eight school districts were in the 10 lowest performing districts in more than one area of student achievement. One district, which appeared in the lowest performing districts in all four areas of student achievement, reported the use of the America's Choice model. Other commonalities were also found in the lowest performing school districts. Two districts mentioned that they were implementing, this year, the co-teaching inclusion model of instruction and the Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) model. One district noted they were implementing the inclusion model on a limited basis due to budget constraints. Two districts reported using an oversight, or monitoring model, but no details were provided. Two districts noted the use of benchmark assessments as a way to improve student performance and one district reported using the Corrective Reading program.

Three covariates were considered initially for analysis: teacher quality, per pupil expenditures, and class size. However, since the literature review was inconclusive regarding an association between student achievement and per pupil expenditures and between student achievement and class size, these variables were not considered as covariates. On the contrary, the literature review concluded that teacher quality was associated with student achievement. Nevertheless, there was a weak association between the independent variable and the dependent variables in the first place. Further, when a correlation was computed to determine if there was a relationship between the teacher quality in terms of average number of teachers with advanced degrees and the independent variable, a weak, negative association was found,  $r = -.229$ ,  $p = .062$ . Thus, no covariates were included in the analysis.

This chapter presented the results of the study on the superintendents' self-reported leadership practices and the correlation with the reading and mathematics performance of their SWDs and students with LEP in grades 3-8 and described additional practices that superintendents reported using to address the instructional needs of these students. Challenges that faced superintendents in meeting the needs of SWDs and students with LEP were also discussed. Chapter V includes a summary of the study and conclusions drawn from the data along with limitations and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover if there was a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of North Carolina superintendents and the achievement of students with LEP and SWDs as measured by state assessments. The research questions for the study were:

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their students with LEP?
2. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their students with LEP?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and reading achievement of their SWDs?
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the self-reported instructional leadership practices of superintendents and mathematics achievement of their SWDs?

A list of current superintendents was generated from the 2009-2010 North Carolina Education Directory and was cross-referenced with the 2008-09 North Carolina Education Directory to determine superintendents who were in their current positions during the 2008-09 school year. Ninety-four superintendents were included in the sampling frame. The study used a self-reporting survey methodology. The corresponding

achievement data for SWDs and students with LEP for these districts were accessed from each corresponding district's North Carolina District Report Card.

In 2006, Waters and Marzano published a meta-analysis study that concluded that there were 29 practices within five areas of superintendent responsibility that had a statistically significant correlation to student achievement. Further, the North Carolina State Board of Education adopted the North Carolina Standards for Superintendents in 2006, which reflected the findings in Waters and Marzano's meta-analysis. The current study sought to take this research further to determine if these 29 superintendent leadership practices within five areas of superintendent responsibility had a statistically significant correlation with reading and mathematics achievement of SWDs and students with LEP.

The assessment of SWDs and students with LEP draws support from some groups and comes under criticism from other groups. Groups supporting the assessment for SWDs proposed that not including SWDs in state assessments signifies that the performance and progress of those students are not important (Defur, 2002; Landau, Vohs, & Romano, n.d.; Yesseldyke, et al., 2003; Yesseldyke, et al., 2004). Further, including SWDs in statewide assessments has resulted in educators exhibiting higher expectations for SWDs and greater access to the general curriculum (Defur, 2002; Thurlow, et al., 2008). Accordingly, since the onset of NCLB, schools across the nation have made gains in the achievement of their SWDs (Cole, 2006; Schulte, et al., 2001; Thurlow, et al., 2008; Yesseldyke, et al., 2003).

However, one unintended consequence for including SWDs in high stakes assessments is that many times they become the scapegoats for the school's performance

under NCLB (Cole 2006; Sherman, 2008). Further, in at least one study, superintendents in one state reported they had received more pressure to pull students out of the general curriculum and these superintendents perceived that the inclusion of SWDs in statewide assessments has contributed to an increased dropout rate for this group of students (Sherman 2008).

Many of these same arguments and perceptions hold true for including students with LEP in statewide assessments. Proponents for including students with LEP in statewide assessments claim that teachers will become more attentive and aggressive in meeting the instructional needs of students and, conversely, excluding them from statewide assessments increases the possibility that they will be denied quality educational experiences (Butler & Stevens, 2001; Coltrane, 2002). However, most experts agree that it takes a student anywhere from four to seven years to achieve academic proficiency in a non-native language, yet under the current NCLB guidelines, students with LEP must be assessed after being in the U.S. for twelve months (Center for Public Education, 2007; Collier, 1987; Hakuta, et al., 2000).

*Research Questions One and Two: Superintendents' Leadership Practices and Reading and Mathematics Achievement of Students with LEP*

Sixty-eight pairs of superintendent survey responses and the reading and mathematics performance data for students with LEP were correlated to determine if there were statistically significant relationships. The results of both correlations showed negative, nonsignificant correlations. Therefore, the observed correlations between the self-reported superintendents' leadership practices responses and the reading and

mathematics achievement of their students with LEP were likely to have occurred by chance.

Information that was more specific was extracted from the open-ended responses from the 10 highest performing school districts with respect to the reading and mathematics achievement of students with LEP. The most frequently identified practice in the highest performing districts was the Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) model. This North Carolina adaptation of the national model, Response to Intervention (RTI), is used as a universal intervention model to diagnose and then prescribe research-based interventions to accelerate the learning of children who are not performing at grade level. This model assumes that effective classroom instruction is in place, but emphasizes frequent use of diagnostic student assessments and targeted student interventions to accelerate the learning of students who are behind in their mastery of grade level content standards (NCDPI, 2010). Another district also reported using the practice of interim student assessments as a means of monitoring student achievement. Superintendents adopting the practice of frequently monitoring student achievement align with the practice of monitoring found in Waters and Marzano's work. In addition, this practice was supported by other research on highly effective school districts in which goals for student achievement and instruction were frequently monitored with interim student assessments and frequent classroom observations (Foley et al., n.d.; Murphy & Hallinger, 1998; Snipes et al., 2002; SREB, 2009).

The SIOP model was the next most frequently identified practice of high performing districts. This is a research-based model of instruction that has proven effective in addressing the needs of students with LEP (Center for Applied Linguistics,

n.d.). Further, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has supported this instructional model and has provided extensive professional development for school districts. Adopting a district-wide instructional framework aligns with the Waters and Marzano's area of leadership responsibility of establishing district goals for instruction and achievement and the practices of implementing and replicating effective instructional models. In other studies, common findings in school districts with high student performance was the process of disaggregating student performance data, publicly reporting the data, and seeking stakeholder input before establishing district goals for instruction and student achievement (Borba, 2002; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; NCDPI, 2000; Sherman, 2008; Skrla, et al., 2000). In addition, these goals for instruction and student achievement were considered non-negotiable with the further expectation that schools aligned their improvement efforts to the district's goals (Snipes, et al., 2002; SREB, 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Thus, in high performing school districts, there was a common vision for student performance and common goals for student achievement that guided and directed the work of the district. Similarly, in high performing school districts there was an emphasis on implementing and replicating effective instructional practices and models (Snipes, et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Another superintendent cited that specialized professional development was a strategy that had been used to strengthen the instructional capacity of teachers to better meet the needs of students with LEP. Studies have indicated that in highly effective school districts, it is common that teachers formally collaborate to strengthen instructional practices and engage in common district professional development

initiatives (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Ragland, et al., 1998; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). However, one of the top performing districts identified that due to the small district size, they lacked the ability to provide on-site professional development for teachers and, consequently, this was perceived as a challenge in meeting the instructional needs of students with LEP.

Two districts noted that due to limited resources, it has been difficult to respond appropriately and adequately to the needs of the students. In high achieving school districts, school boards made policy and budgeting decisions that supported district goals for instruction and achievement (Ragland et al., 1998; Snipes & Casserly, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Thus, if resources are insufficient or are not targeted to specific goals for instruction and achievement, this could be a barrier to meeting the instructional goals for this population.

In examining the 10 districts with the lowest performance of students with LEP in reading and mathematics achievement, several commonalities are noteworthy. Of the districts that provided information on the open-ended responses, three were in the 10 lowest performing districts in both reading and mathematics for students with LEP. One of these districts noted the use of the Corrective Reading program; one district reported the use of the America's Choice program; one district noted a two-way immersion model. While these districts reported district-wide implementation of these programs, it brings to question as to whether these programs have been implemented with fidelity, whether the implementation is perhaps in the infancy stages, or whether these programs are not effective in meeting the instructional needs of their students with LEP. Further, other variables that may have contributed to the performance of students with LEP were not



examined. It is interesting to note that the districts falling in the lowest performance band had more than twice the mean number of students with LEP ( $M = 278.4$ ) than the mean number of students with LEP in the top performing districts ( $M = 133$ ). However, the number of students with LEP participating in state assessments represented 4.1% of the total tested student population in the lowest performing districts and the number of students with LEP participating in state assessments represented 5.5% of the total tested student population in the highest performing districts. Thus, percentages of students with LEP are not that different between the highest and lowest performing districts.

*Research Questions Three and Four: Superintendents' Leadership Practices and Reading and Mathematics Performance of SWDs*

Seventy pairs of superintendent survey responses and the reading and mathematics performance data for SWDs were correlated to determine if there was a statistically significant relationship. The results of both correlations showed negative, nonsignificant correlations. Therefore, the associations between the self-reported superintendents' leadership practices responses and the reading and mathematics achievement of their SWDs were likely to have occurred by chance.

Information gleaned from the open-ended survey responses included the use of identified district-wide instructional models. The highest performing district in reading and mathematics achievement for SWDs emphasized teachers' district-wide use of Marzano's top five identified practices that most improve student achievement. Another of the top performing districts identified the use of Reading Foundations as a means to strengthen reading instructional practices of teachers and another district reported the use of differentiated instruction throughout the district. Again, studies in high performing

districts concluded that in these districts there was an emphasis on implementing and replicating effective instructional practices and models (Snipes, et al., 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The highest performing district in reading and mathematics achievement for SWDs reported that principals were expected to monitor instruction on a daily basis to ensure that identified district-wide instructional practices were being implemented in classrooms on a consistent basis. Two top performing districts in the study reported the use of interim student benchmark assessments to monitor student mastery and to identify focused instructional interventions for students. Similarly, another top performing district identified the use of RtI as a district-wide approach to monitoring student performance and to designing student intervention plans to accelerate the learning of SWDs. Further, another district reported designing school schedules so that these student interventions could take place during the school day. These monitoring practices align with research gleaned from other studies in highly effective school districts in which monitoring student achievement and the instructional program were common practices (Foley et al., n.d.; Murphy & Hallinger, 1998; Snipes et al., 2002, SREB; 2009).

Another top performing district superintendent reported the practice of special education teachers collaborating with regular classroom teachers and providing an inclusion model of instruction. Studies have indicated that in highly effective school districts, it is common that teachers formally collaborate to strengthen instructional practices (Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Finally, four districts noted that the lack of adequate resources to support the learning of SWDs was a challenge. These findings support former studies in high achieving districts, which

concluded that aligning budgets to support district goals for instruction and achievement was a practice that supported higher student achievement (Ragland et al., 1998; Snipes & Casserly, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

In examining the 10 lowest performing districts with respect to reading and mathematics achievement of SWDs, several issues are worth noting. One district was in the 10 lowest performing districts for both reading and mathematics and reported the use of the America's Choice program. One district reported the use of the Corrective Reading program. Two districts noted they were in the implementation phases of the co-teaching inclusion model and the RtI model and one district reported using the inclusion model on a limited basis due to budget constraints. Districts falling in the lowest performance band had a mean number of SWDs ( $M = 598.5$ ) that was much larger than the mean number of SWDs in the top performing districts ( $M = 362.4$ ). Further, SWDs represented 13.2% of the total tested student population in districts from the lowest performing districts and SWDs represented 11% of the total tested student population in districts from the highest performing districts.

#### *Methodological Implications*

The theoretical framework for the current study was based on meta-analysis research conducted by Waters and Marzano (2006). According to Glass (1976), a meta-analysis is “. . . the statistical analysis of a large collection of analysis results from individual studies for the purpose of integrating the findings” (p. 3). Typically, the researchers examine the body of literature on a particular topic and seek to synthesize the research. In the case of the Waters and Marzano's meta-analysis, only studies in which there was a reported correlation between district leadership and student achievement were

chosen for the meta-analysis (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Florax (2001) proposed this is a pitfall in meta-analysis research, since studies are rarely published that have no statistical significance. Further, twenty-seven studies were identified for use in Waters and Marzano's meta-analysis and twenty of those studies were doctoral dissertations, without any mention that studies were first examined to determine if the research studies were well-designed. Glass (1976) proposed that another pitfall of meta-analysis research is not treating poorly designed studies differently than well-designed studies. Waters and Marzano (2006) proposed the use of a rigorous methodology for their meta-analysis, which included corrections for sampling error and measurement error for the individual studies. However, the fact remains that only studies reporting a correlation between district leadership and student achievement were used in the meta-analysis and 74% of the studies used were doctoral dissertations.

#### *Strengths, Limitations, and Delimitations*

This study was conducted in North Carolina with current superintendents who were in their current position during the 2008-09 school year. All but 22 of these superintendents responded to the survey for a 76% response rate. Further, all but six respondents provided information on the demographic portion of the survey. Eighty-one percent of the superintendents in the sampling frame were male and 19% were females, which is similar to the representation of males and females in the total population of superintendents in North Carolina (2009e). However, there is no possible way to compare similarities of respondents to nonrespondents or to the general population.

The study identified two models of instruction that superintendents in the highest performing districts reported as practices that have been implemented to support the

achievement of SWDs and students with LEP. Moreover, the study identified the practice of frequently monitoring student achievement by using diagnostic, interim assessments as a method to increase the achievement of SWDs and students with LEP. However, there is no way to determine if the practices and programs that superintendents reported have been implemented for a sustained period of time and with fidelity.

The study was limited by asking superintendents to self-report their instructional leadership practices, thus there are possible issues with social desirability tendencies as superintendents may have reported answers they believed were favorable or desirable. Additionally, there was a presumed link between the superintendents' practices and student achievement. Specifically, there was a presumed link between the superintendents' practices identified in the theoretical framework of Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis and the achievement of specific groups of students, namely, SWDs and students with LEP.

The survey validation phase also contained limitations as four Western Carolina University faculty from the Educational Leadership and Foundations Department were asked to categorize the survey items into one of five identified superintendent's responsibilities from the research of Waters and Marzano (2006). The four validators made the same groupings as Waters and Marzano did 50% of the time, but on the other 50% of items, only half of the validators agreed with the groupings. Further, after an exploratory factor analysis of the actual survey items was conducted, it was determined that the survey items did not clearly load onto factors that corresponded to the five identified areas of the theoretical framework. Thus, the survey responses were summed across all areas for the statistical analyses. There are also possible errors associated with

answers respondents provided in the survey research. Fowler (2009) proposed that sometimes these errors may be a result of the respondent misunderstanding the question, or not having enough information or knowledge to report a true answer. During the survey pilot test, respondents were asked to identify ambiguous and unclear survey questions and adjustments were made to those survey questions.

One limitation of correlational research is that the student achievement data used in the study were collected at one point in time, thus achievement trend data or longitudinal data were not considered in the study. Another limitation to the study design is that disaggregated data by student disability were not available, thus the performance data from the entire spectrum of SWDs were aggregated and used in the study. Only using superintendents in North Carolina that were in their current position during the 2008-09 school year was a delimitation of the study. However, the study was purposefully limited to North Carolina and the most current available student achievement data were from the 2008-09 school year.

#### *Implications for Future Practice and Future Research*

The current study provided information regarding specific programs and practices that participating superintendents identified as having a positive impact on the achievement of SWDs and students with LEP. In addition, commonalities in these programs and practices were extracted from the districts that had the highest performance with respect to the percentage of SWDs and students with LEP performing at grade level. Implications for future practice suggest that school districts should consider implementing the following strategies:

- Monitoring of student learning by using interim diagnostic student assessments,
- Implementing district-wide instructional models, and
- Aligning resources to support targeted areas.

More specifically, the current study suggests that school districts may want to consider using a district-wide model of SIOP to meet the instructional needs of students with LEP. Moreover, districts may want to consider the RtI model for implementing diagnostic assessments and targeted interventions for both SWDs and students with LEP.

In addition to embracing instructional models on a district-wide basis, research has shown that school districts need to support teachers with on-going professional development as they learn to refine their teaching practices (Borba, 2002; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Skrla, et al., 2000; SREB, 2009). Thus, superintendents would benefit from designing a model of professional learning that includes professional learning communities, as well as some type of classroom-based instructional coaching model. Further, superintendents would profit from setting the expectation that classroom instruction will be monitored, and that formative feedback will be provided to teachers in order to increase their instructional capacity (NCDPI, 2000; Murphy & Hallinger, 1998; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004; SREB; 2009; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Superintendents would also benefit from embracing the use of diagnostic, interim student assessments that are aligned to state curriculum standards for all students. Subsequently, the RtI model requires further diagnostic assessments that drill down and identify prerequisite skills for individual students who are not mastering the grade level content so that targeted intervention can be designed for struggling students.

The study also suggests that inadequate funding is an issue that superintendents frequently cited as a challenge in meeting the needs of SWDs and students with LEP. Even though there is no consensus in the research that per pupil funding has a positive relationship to student achievement (Ellinger, 1995; Hanushek, 1996; Ram, 2004; Sutton & Soderstrom, 2001), superintendents would benefit from examining how district funds are being used to support the instructional needs of SWDs and students with LEP to ensure that available resources are used to implement research-based programs, sustain professional development, and employ highly effective teachers.

In examining school districts with the lowest performance with respect to SWDs and students with LEP, one district appeared in the lowest performance band in both reading and mathematics for both groups of students. This superintendent reported the use of a school-wide redesign model, America's Choice. Another district in which their students with LEP scored in the lowest 10 performing districts in both reading and mathematics reported the use of a commercially developed reading program, Corrective Reading. Thus, superintendents may want to examine program evaluations on these programs, particularly program evaluations conducted by third party evaluators, before making implementation decisions.

Since one of the limitations of the study was asking superintendents to self-report their practices, future research that would capture a more accurate perception of superintendents' leadership practices could be conducted by surveying district level administrators other than the superintendent. This would eliminate the social desirability tendencies, however, it may be difficult to achieve high response rates when requesting district level administrators to rate their immediate supervisor. Another option for future



research would be to conduct case studies with observations in districts with the highest performing SWDs and students with LEP.

Finally, three superintendents from the lowest performing districts in both reading and mathematics for both groups of students reported the lack of high expectations for student learning was a challenge in meeting the needs of these groups of students. Hence, superintendents should examine teacher beliefs and if applicable, take measures to raise teacher expectations for these students. In addition, institutions of higher learning with superintendent licensure programs should consider implementing course content that specifically addresses the instructional needs of SWDs and students with LEP. Further, course content should review the impact that teacher expectations has on student achievement and the implications for superintendents to establish high expectations for all students.

### *Conclusions*

Waters and Marzano (2006) published a meta-analysis study that concluded there were 29 practices within five areas of superintendent responsibility that had a statistically significant correlation to student achievement. Further, this research served as the foundation for the North Carolina Standards for Superintendents, which were adopted in 2006. The current study sought to take this research further to determine if these 29 superintendent leadership practices within five areas of superintendent responsibility had a statistically significant correlation to reading and mathematics achievement of SWDs and students with LEP.

While no statistically significant relationship could be found between these 29 superintendents' practices and the achievement of their SWDs and students with LEP, the

findings of the study identified commonalities in school districts that had the highest performance for these groups of students. Even though many of these districts with high performance included small numbers of students with LEP, these school districts identified the following practices:

- Monitoring of student learning by using interim diagnostic student assessments,
- Aligning resources to support targeted areas, and
- Implementing district-wide instructional models.

More specifically, the current study identified the use of a district-wide model of SIOP to meet the instructional needs of students with LEP and the RtI model for implementing individual diagnostic assessments and targeted interventions for both SWDs and students with LEP.

Similarly, Waters and Marzano (2006) identified the practice of monitoring student achievement and instruction in their meta-analysis as an area of superintendent responsibility that affects student achievement. Further, they identified the alignment of resources to support district goals for achievement and instruction as an area of superintendent responsibility that is associated with student achievement. Finally, adopting and implementing a district-wide model of instruction was identified in the theoretical framework as a practice linked to student achievement. Consequently, this study identified some areas of superintendent responsibility and superintendent practices that align to the theoretical framework and show promise in increasing the performance of SWDs and students with LEP. These areas and practices can assist superintendents and

district staff in their quest to discover ways to increase the performance of these two groups of students.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Permission to use Defur's (2002) Conceptual Framework depicting Assumptions for the Benefits of including SWDs in High Stakes Assessments.



Printed by: Kathy Revis

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Page 1 of 1

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From:  "Sharon deFur" <shdefu@wm.edu> Wednesday, January 13, 2010 10:49:26 PM 

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Kathy

I am pleased that you found the framework helpful and that it continues to be useful --- I am happy to agree to your use of it.

Best wishes for a successful research and dissertations experience...

Sharon deFur

[Marker]

**From:** Kathy Revis [<mailto:krevis@henderson.k12.nc.us>]

**Sent:** Wednesday, January 13, 2010 8:57 PM

**To:** [shdefu@wm.edu](mailto:shdefu@wm.edu)

**Subject:** permission to reproduce graphic organizer

Dr. Defur,

My name is Kathy Revis and I am a doctoral student at Western Carolina University and am currently writing my dissertation regarding superintendents' leadership behaviors and the impact on the achievement of students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. In my literature review I am addressing issues surrounding the assessment of students with disabilities and have read your 2002 article entitled Education Reform, High-Stakes Assessment, and Students with Disabilities. I really like your conceptual framework graphic organizer in the article depicting your "... assumptions underlying the inclusion of students with disabilities in state assessment programs..." and would like permission to use this in my dissertation, with proper citation, of course.

Kathy G. Revis  
 Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction  
 Henderson County Public Schools  
 828-697-4513

## Appendix B: North Carolina Standards for Superintendents

As Approved by the State Board of Education  
September 6, 2007

### **Standard 1: Strategic Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective strategic leadership when he or she:

- Creates a working relationship with the local board of education that results in a shared vision for the district of the changing world in the 21st century that schools are preparing children to enter;
- Systematically challenges the status quo by leading change with potentially beneficial outcomes;
- Systematically considers new ways of accomplishing tasks and is comfortable with major changes in how processes are implemented;
- Models and reinforces the culture and vision of the district by having open discussion sessions with teachers, school executives, staff, board members, and other stakeholders regarding the strategic direction of the district and encouraging their feedback on how to better attain the district's vision, mission, and goals;
- Is a driving force behind major initiatives that help students acquire 21st century skills;
- Creates processes that provide for the development, periodic review, and revision of the district's vision, mission, and strategic goals by all stakeholders;
- Creates processes to ensure the district's identity (vision, mission, values, beliefs and goals) actually drives decisions and reflects the culture of the district;
- Facilitates the collaborative development of annual school improvement plans to realize strategic goals and objectives, adhering to statutory requirements;
- Facilitates the development and implementation of a district strategic plan, aligned to the mission and goals set by the State Board of Education and local priorities, using multiple sources of data (e.g., student performance data, data from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey), in concert with the local board of education;
- Determines financial priorities, in concert with the local board of education, based on the strategic plan;
- Facilitates the implementation of state education policy;
- Facilitates the setting of high, concrete goals and the expectations that all students meet them;
- Monitors progress in meeting district goals;
- Communicates strong professional beliefs about schools, learning, and teaching that reflect latest research and best practice in preparing students for success in college or work;
- Creates processes to distribute leadership throughout the district.

## **Standard 2: Instructional Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective instructional leadership when he or she:

- Leads with a clear, high-profile focus on learning and teaching oriented towards high expectations and concrete goals;
- Challenges staff to reflect deeply on and define the knowledge, skills, and concepts essential for ensuring that every public school student graduates from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st century;
- Establishes effectively functioning professional learning communities;
- Ensures collaborative goal setting resulting in non-negotiable goals (i.e., goals that all staff members must act upon) for student achievement and classroom instruction;
- Ensures that there is an appropriate and logical alignment between the district's curriculum, 21st century instruction and assessment, and the state accountability program;
- Establishes clear priorities among the district's instructional goals and objectives;
- Creates processes for using student test data and formative data from other sources for the improvement of instruction;
- Utilizes an instructional evaluation program that accurately monitors implementation of the district's instructional program;
- Creates processes for identifying, implementing, and monitoring use of 21st century instructional tools and best practices for meeting diverse student needs;
- Creates processes that ensure the strategic allocation and use of resources to meet instructional goals and support teacher needs;
- Creates process to provide formal feedback to school executives concerning the effectiveness of their instructional leadership;
- Monitors student achievement through feedback from the instructional evaluation program;
- Ensures that instructional time is valued and protected;
- Provides professional development for school executives in the area of instructional leadership.

## **Standard 3: Cultural Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective cultural leadership when he or she:

- Communicates strong ideals and beliefs about schooling, teaching, and professional learning communities with all the stakeholders and then operates from those beliefs;
- Builds community understanding of what is required to ensure that every public school student graduates from high school, globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st century;
- Creates a school system (and not a "system of schools") in which shared vision and equitable practices are the norm;
- Builds trust and promotes a sense of well-being between and among staff, students, parents, and the community at large;



- Systematically and fairly acknowledges failures and celebrates accomplishments of the district;
- Visibly supports and actively engages in the positive, culturally-responsive traditions of the community;
- Creates opportunities for both staff involvement in the community and community involvement in the schools;
- Creates an environment in which diversity is valued and is promoted.

#### **Standard 4: Human Resource Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective human resource leadership when he or she:

- Ensures that necessary resources, including time and personnel, are allocated to achieve the district's goals for achievement and instruction;
- Provides for the development of effective professional learning communities aligned with the district strategic plan, focused on results, and characterized by collective responsibility for 21st century student learning;
- Participates in consistent, sustained, and open communication with school executives particularly about how policies and practices relate to the district mission and vision;
- Models the importance of continued adult learning by engaging in activities to develop professional knowledge and skill;
- Communicates a positive attitude about the ability of personnel to accomplish substantial outcomes;
- Creates processes for educators to assume leadership and decision-making roles;
- Ensures processes for hiring, inducting and mentoring new teachers, new school executives, and other staff that result in the recruitment and retention of highly qualified and diverse personnel;
- Uses data, including the results of the Teacher Working Conditions Survey, to create and maintain a positive work environment;
- Ensures that all staff are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner and that the results of evaluations are used to improve performance;
- Provides for results-oriented professional development that is aligned with identified 21st century curricular, instructional, and assessment needs, is connected to the district improvement goals, and is differentiated based on staff needs;
- Continuously searches for the best placement and utilization of staff to fully develop and benefit from their strengths;
- Identifies strategic positions in the district and has a succession plan for each key position.

#### **Standard 5: Managerial Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective managerial leadership when he or she:

- Applies and assesses current technologies for management, business procedures, and scheduling;

- Creates collaborative budget processes to align resources with the district vision and strategic plan through proactive financial leadership using a value-added assessment process;
- Identifies and plans for facility needs;
- Assesses and reassesses programs and resource allocation and use for relevancy and impact as the organization changes;
- Collaboratively develops and enforces clear expectations, structures, rules and procedures for effective and efficient operations;
- Creates processes to build consensus, communicate, and resolve conflicts in a fair and democratic way;
- Assures a system of communication that provides for timely and responsible exchange of information among school and district staff and stakeholder groups;
- Assures scheduling processes and protocols that maximize staff input, address diverse student learning needs, and provide individual and on-going collaborative planning time for every teacher;
- Creates processes for the storage, security, privacy, and integrity of data;
- Collaboratively develops and enforces clear expectations, structures, rules and procedures for ensuring the safety of students and staff;
- Develops, implements, and monitors emergency plans in collaboration with appropriate local, state, and federal officials.

### **Standard 6: External Development Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective external development leadership when he or she:

- Develops collaborative partnerships with the greater community to support the 21st century learning priorities of the school district and its schools;
- Implements processes that engage stakeholders in shaping and then supporting significant (non-negotiable) achievement and instructional goals for the district and its schools;
- Creates systems that engage the local board, county commissioners, and all community stakeholders in a shared responsibility for aligning their support for district goals for student and school success;
- Designs protocols and processes that ensure compliance with federal, state and district mandates;
- Develops and implements proactive partnerships with community colleges, universities, professional associations, and other key professional development organizations to provide effective training and development opportunities for school district employees;
- Develops and implements proactive partnerships with community colleges and universities to ensure all students have access to college courses while in high school and that barriers to enrollment in the courses are eliminated;
- Communicates the schools' and districts' status and needs to the local board, county commissioners, and public media to garner additional support for meeting district goals;

- Builds relationships with individuals and groups to support the district's learning-teaching agenda and its potential for individual school and school district improvement.

**Standard 7: Micropolitical Leadership**

Practices: The superintendent practices effective micropolitical leadership when he or she:

- Provides leadership in defining superintendent and board roles and mutual expectations that result in an effective superintendent-board working relationship;
- Defines and understands the internal and external political systems and their impact on the educational organization;
- Defines, understands, and communicates the impact of legal issues affecting public education;
- Surveys and understands the political, economic, and social aspects/needs of groups in the community, and those of the community at large, for effective and responsive decision-making;
- Prepares and recommends district policies to improve student learning and district performance in compliance with local, state and federal requirements;
- Applies laws, policies and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately;
- Utilizes legal systems to protect the rights of students and staff and to improve learning opportunities;
- Accesses local, state and national political systems to provide input on critical educational issues.

## Appendix C: Water and Marzano's Leadership Practices and Responsibilities

Superintendent Responsibilities	Ave. r	Practices used by superintendent & executive/district office staff to fulfill superintendent responsibilities
<p><b>Goal-setting process</b>  <i>The superintendent involves board members and principals in the process of setting goals.</i></p>	.24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a shared vision for the goal setting process</li> <li>• Using the goal setting process to set goals developed jointly by board and administration</li> <li>• Developing goals that are coherent and reflect attendant values which support involvement and quality in achievement rather than maintenance of the status quo</li> <li>• Communicating expectations to central office staff and principals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Non-negotiable goals for achievement &amp; instruction</b>  <i>Goals for student achievement and instructional program are adopted and are based on relevant research.</i></p>	.33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modeling understanding of instructional design</li> <li>• Establishing clear priorities among the district's instructional goals and objectives</li> <li>• Adopting instructional methodologies that facilitate the efficient delivery of the district's curriculum</li> <li>• Incorporating varied and diverse instructional methodologies that allow for a wide range of learning styles that exist in a multi-racial student population</li> <li>• Adopting 5-year non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction</li> <li>• Ensuring that a preferred instructional program is adopted and implemented</li> </ul>
<p><b>Board alignment with &amp; support of district goals</b>  <i>Board support for district goals for achievement and instruction is maintained.</i></p>	.29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing agreement with the board president on district goals</li> <li>• Establishing agreement with the board president on type and nature of conflict in the district</li> <li>• Along with the board president, remaining situationally aware, agreeing on the political climate of the school district</li> <li>• Establishing agreement with the board president on the nature of teaching/learning strategies to be used in the district</li> <li>• Providing professional development for board members</li> <li>• Establishing agreement with the board president on the effectiveness of board training</li> </ul>

<p><b>Monitoring goals for achievement &amp; instruction</b>  <i>The superintendent monitors and evaluates implementation of the district instructional program, impact of instruction on achievement, and impact of implementation on implementers.</i></p>	.27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Using an instructional evaluation program that accurately monitors implementation of the district’s instructional program</li> <li>● Monitoring student achievement through feedback from the instructional evaluation program</li> <li>● Using a system to manage instructional change</li> <li>● Annually evaluating principals</li> <li>● Reporting student achievement data to the board on a regular basis</li> <li>● Ensuring that the curricular needs of all student populations are met</li> <li>● Observing classrooms during school visits</li> <li>● Coordinating efforts of individuals and groups within the organization to increase reliability of the system, with adjustments by individuals to quickly respond to system failures</li> </ul>
<p><b>Use of resources to support the goals for achievement &amp; instruction</b>  <i>Resources are dedicated and used for professional development of teachers and principals to achieve district goals.</i></p>	.26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Adopting an instructional and resource management system supporting implementation of the district’s instructional philosophy</li> <li>● Providing extensive teacher and principal staff development</li> <li>● Training all instructional staff in a common but flexible instructional model</li> <li>● Controlling resource allocation</li> <li>● Providing access to professional growth opportunities through the design of a master plan to coordinate in-service activities of the district</li> </ul>

## Appendix D: Permission to Adapt Work from McREL



October 20, 2009

Kathy G. Revis  
414, 4th Ave. West  
Hendersonville, NC 28739

Permission is hereby granted to Kathy Revis to quote from, adapt and cite in her doctoral dissertation for Western Carolina University the following material which is copyrighted by McREL:

Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

We request a standard scholarly citation to this material along with the statement "Used by permission of McREL."

We understand your dissertation will not be commercially published. This permission is limited to the material and purpose stated. Prior written permission is required for any additional uses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Brannan".

Linda Brannan  
Lead Consultant

## Appendix E: Survey Field Test Feedback Form

1. Were the directions clear?

\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_ No    If not, please use the space below to make comments that will help me add clarity to the directions?

2. Please list the statements, by number, that were ambiguous to you.

3. Please make any suggestions that will make the format of the survey easier to follow or easier to understand.

4. Can you give me any other suggestions that would improve the survey?

5. How long did it take you to complete the survey? \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey and for providing your valuable feedback. Please FAX your completed survey and the feedback form to Kathy Revis @ 828-697-4738 by \_\_\_\_\_. Please feel free to contact me with any suggestions or questions. Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

Kathy Revis,  
Assistant Superintendent, Henderson County Public Schools  
Western Carolina University Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix F: Superintendent Survey

Code \_\_\_\_\_

The purpose of this survey is to gather information from North Carolina superintendents regarding their instructional leadership practices to determine if these self-reported practices have any relationship to the achievement of their students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. Information from the survey is coded for research purposes, but will remain confidential and codes will be destroyed after the completion of data analysis. Please send the survey back in the return stamped envelope by March 26, 2010. Thank you in advance for participating in this study.

**Part I. Please answer the following statements depending on the degree with which you agree with each statement by placing a “√” in the appropriate box using the following scale.**

**SA** = Strongly agree                      **A** = Agree                      **N** = Neither agree nor disagree  
**D** = Disagree                              **SD** = Strongly disagree

		SA	A	N	D	SD
1	My school district develops a district improvement plan or a strategic plan every three to five years.					
2	My school district engages in a collaborative goal setting process at the district level.					
3	My district has developed a shared vision for the goal setting process.					
4	My district develops goals jointly with the school board and administration.					
5	District goals are measurable in terms of increasing student achievement.					
6	I consider district goals to be non-negotiable.					
7	I take every opportunity to communicate my expectations for student achievement to principals.					
8	I take every opportunity to communicate my expectations for student achievement to central office staff.					
9	I frequently talk with principals about instructional strategies or instructional models.					
10	I have established clear priorities with the district’s instructional goals and objectives.					
	<b>Please continue to the next page</b>					



		<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
11	Our district has adopted a preferred district-wide instructional model or framework.					
12	I have ensured that this instructional model incorporates varied and diverse instructional methodologies that allow for a wide range of learning styles.					
13	My district has established a monitoring process for the implementation of the district-wide instructional model or framework.					
14	My district has ensured that all instructional staff are trained in the district's instructional model or framework.					
15	Our district provides instructional support for teachers as they implement the district's instructional model or framework.					
16	The school board chair and I agree on the type and nature of conflict in the district.					
17	The school board chair and I agree on district goals that have been established in the district improvement plan or the district strategic plan.					
18	The school board chair and I have a common understanding on the political climate of the school district.					
19	The school board chair and I agree on the nature of the teaching/learning strategies to be used in the district.					
20	Our district provides professional development for board members on the instructional emphasis of the district.					
21	Our district monitors student achievement by using locally-developed diagnostic assessments.					
22	I understand the change process.					
23	I engage others in the change process to ensure their support of the change and the successful implementation of the change.					
24	I frequently report student achievement results to the school board.					
25	Our district ensures that the curricular needs of <i>all</i> students are met.					
	<b>Please continue to the next page</b>					

		SA	A	N	D	SD
26	I observe classrooms during my school visits.					
27	Our district provides extensive principal staff development.					
28	A priority in our district is to ensure high quality instruction in every classroom, every day.					
29	Our district acknowledges weaknesses in instruction and has staff in place to respond to and support teachers as they work to improve their instructional practices.					
30	I have a system in place to ensure that resources are spent to support the school district's goals.					
31	Our district has a plan for professional development that is coordinated and supported by the district.					

Adapted from *School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement*, by T. J. Waters and R. J. Marzano, 2006. Retrieved from [http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/4005RR\\_Superintendent\\_Leadership.pdf](http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/4005RR_Superintendent_Leadership.pdf)

## Part II. Open-ended Response

1. Are there other practices that you have implemented to strengthen the academic achievement of students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency? If yes, please describe.

2. Please use this space to add any comments about the challenges your district has experienced in meeting the AYP requirements for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency.

**Part III. Please answer the following demographic questions by circling the appropriate answer.**

1. What is the total number of years of experience as a superintendent in your *current school system*?

0-3 years                      4-6 years                      7-10 years                      More than 10

years

2. What is the total number of years of experience as a superintendent?

0-3 years                      4-6 years                      7-10 years                      More than 10

years

3. Gender:    Male                      Female

4. Age:

Under 40      40-45                      46-50                      51-55                      56-60                      61 or

older

If you would like a brief summary of the findings of the study, please indicate this below.

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to receive a brief summary of the findings of the study.

Thank you again for taking your time to complete this survey. Please place the survey in the stamped return envelope and mail back by March 26, 2010.

Sincerely,

Kathy Revis

Assistant Superintendent, Henderson County Public Schools

WCU Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix G: Prenotice letter

March 5, 2010

Inside address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to ask for your help in completing a survey that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation on superintendent instructional leadership practices and their relationship to the achievement of students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. I believe this topic is of interest to all administrators in North Carolina as we continue to seek ways to raise the achievement of these groups of students. In the next few days, you will receive a request to participate in this study by answering a brief survey about your instructional leadership practices.

This study can be possible only with the generous help of selected superintendents in North Carolina. You were selected for the study because you were in your current position last year and your 2009 NC District Report Card published data for your students with disabilities and/or students with limited English proficiency. I realize that you are extremely busy, but I hope you will take 10-15 minutes of your time to help me with this study.

Best Wishes,

Kathy G. Revis  
Assistant Superintendent, Henderson County Public Schools  
Western Carolina University Doctoral Candidate  
phone: 828-697-4513  
email: krevis@henderson.k12.nc.us

## Appendix H: Survey Cover Letter

Dear

My name is Kathy Revis and I am a student in the doctoral program at Western Carolina University and am writing to ask for your help in completing a survey that I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. I am employed by Henderson County Public Schools as Assistant Superintendent of Instruction and I believe this study, which focuses on instructional leadership practices of superintendents and the performance of their students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities, will be of interest to you and hopefully other superintendents in North Carolina. You were selected for the study because you were in your current position last year and your 2009 North Carolina District Report Card published data for your students with disabilities and/or students with limited English proficiency.

In the survey, questions will be asked about your instructional leadership practices. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The information that you provide in the survey will remain confidential. The survey is coded so that your responses can be matched to the performance data from your 2009 District Report Card for your students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency. The data will be aggregated across all school districts so that neither you nor your school district will be identified by name and all codes will be removed once the data is analyzed. While your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time, I hope that you will take time to assist me with this study. A copy of the final study will be made available to you upon request.

Based on all indications, no apparent risks are present to those who choose to participate, and current participants are not likely to receive any benefits from their participation; however, the information gathered from this research project could potentially be used to support the learning of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me at 828-697-4513, or you may contact the Western Carolina faculty supervisor, Dr. Sandra Tonnsen at 828-227-3324. If you have questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the chair of Western Carolina University's Institutional Review Board at 828-227-7212.

Completing the survey will serve as your informed consent. I hope that you will take the time to complete the enclosed survey and mail back in the stamped return envelope by March 26, 2010.

Thank you in advance for being part of this study.

Sincerely,

## Appendix I: Postcard

November \_\_\_\_\_, 2009

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Last week I mailed a survey for completion for my dissertation study. You were selected for the study because you were in your current position last year and your 2009 NC District Report Card published data for your students with disabilities and/or students with limited English proficiency.

If you have already completed and returned your survey, please accept my sincere appreciation. If not, I hope that you will take time over the next few days to complete the survey. I am extremely grateful for your help with my study.

If you did not receive a survey, or if it was misplaced, please email me at [krevis@henderson.k12.nc.us](mailto:krevis@henderson.k12.nc.us) or call me at 828-697-4513 and I will get another survey to you immediately.

Sincerely,

Kathy G. Revis  
Western Carolina University Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix J: Frequency Distributions of Survey Responses

Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. District strategic plan	51	72.9	17	24.3	2	2.9	0	0	0	0
2. Collaborative goal setting	48	68.6	21	30.0	1	1.4	0	0	0	0
3. Shared vision	45	65.2	22	31.9	2	2.9	0	0	0	0
4. Board and superintendent develop goals jointly	49	70.0	18	25.7	1	1.4	2	2.9	0	0
5. Goals are measurable in terms	46	65.7	22	31.4	2	2.9	0	0	0	0
6. District goals are non-negotiable	31	44.3	28	40.0	6	8.6	5	7.1	0	0
7. Communicate expectations to principals	52	74.3	17	24.3	1	1.4	0	0	0	0
8. Communicate expectations to central office	48	68.6	21	30.0	1	1.4	0	0	0	0
9. Talk with principals about instruction	40	57.1	26	37.1	3	4.3	1	1.4	0	0
10. Priorities set for instruction	42	60.0	27	38.6	1	1.4	0	0	0	0
11. district-wide instructional model	35	50.0	26	37.1	5	7.1	2	2.9	2	2.9
12. Diverse instruction	30	42.9	33	47.1	6	8.6	1	1.4	0	0
13. Monitoring process	27	38.6	34	48.6	8	11.4	0	0	1	1.4
14. All staff are trained	29	41.4	31	44.3	10	14.3	0	0	0	0
15. Instructional support is provided	33	47.1	35	50.0	2	2.9	0	0	0	0

## Appendix J (Continued)

Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
16. Agreement with chair on conflict	29	41.4	27	38.6	10	14.3	4	5.7	0	0
17. Agreement with chair on goals	37	52.9	29	41.4	4	5.7	0	0	0	0
18. Agreement with chair on political climate	42	60.0	20	28.6	3	4.3	4	5.7	1	1.4
19. Agreement with chair on teaching strategies	33	47.3	26	37.1	9	12.9	2	2.9	0	0
20. Professional development for Board	15	21.4	34	48.6	13	18.6	7	10.0	1	1.4
21. Use diagnostic interim assessments	31	44.3	30	42.9	4	5.7	3	4.3	2	2.9
22. Understand the change process	48	68.6	22	31.4	0	0	0	0	0	0
23. Engage others in change process	47	67.1	22	31.4	1	1.4	0	0	0	0
24. Report student achievement results	42	60.0	27	38.6	0	0	1	1.4	0	0
25. Meets curricular needs of all students	30	42.9	35	50.0	3	4.3	1	1.4	1	1.4
26. Observe classrooms	41	58.6	25	35.7	2	2.9	2	2.9	0	0
27. Principal staff development	28	40.0	38	54.3	2	2.9	2	2.9	0	0
28. Ensures high quality instruction	61	87.1	9	12.9	0	0	0	0	0	0
29. Responds to weakness in instruction	30	42.9	38	54.3	2	2.9	0	0	0	0
30. Resources aligned to district goals	39	55.7	27	38.6	4	5.7	0	0	0	0



## Appendix J (Continued)

Question	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
31. District plan for professional development	40	57.1	30	42.9	0	0	0	0	0	0